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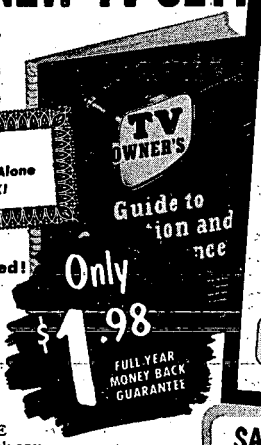

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How To bring in weak channels clearly with only 5 minutes work.
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How To repair your own set, on the spot, with no special equipment, no experience.
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How To know what the repair should cost, and avoid overcharges.
How To avoid long waits when you give your set to a repairman.
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How To correct minor defects and avoid major breakdowns.
How To buy at auction sales—discount houses—second hand shops.
How To know your legal rights with your landlord, repair man, service contract.
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Hitler resisted, but the doctor was quite firm and had his way. The book

"I WAS HITLER'S DOCTOR"

is the 320-page story of what followed, the record of the most daring excursion ever made into the sexual aspects of the paranoid human ego.

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Writing with the passion for truth and fact-finding of the scientist, Dr. Krueger takes his patient back to his childhood love of his young mother and hate of his aging father, his early degradations, his relations with the town idiot, and his attitude towards his sisters—especially the wayward one he never mentioned to anyone else.

He brings out Hitler's *young girl fixation*, his case of *chorus girl fantasy*, and shows why he married only *when it could not be expected of him to consummate his marriage.*

Such records are usually sealed in secret files for professional reference only. But as he continued to treat his monstrous patient, three things dawned on Dr. Krueger:—

1. His life was in danger. 2. The world's life was in danger. 3. The public safety comes before medical ethics.

Dr. Krueger's escape to America and the publication of his book followed as matters of course.

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"Hitler flows into the madness of this age and

THE MADNESS OF THIS AGE

flows into Hitler," writes Dr. Arvin Enlind of the U. S. Army Medical Reserve in one of the book's three revealing introductions.

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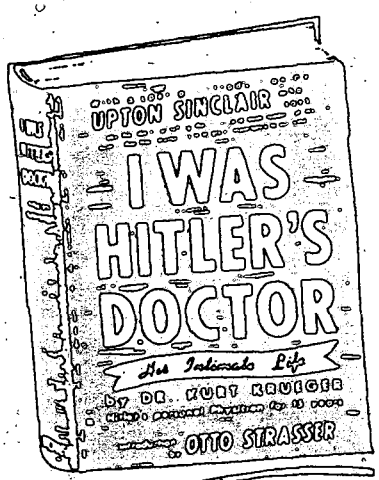

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VOLUME 14 NUMBER 6

All Stories Complete

THE WOMAN IN SKIN 13 (Novel—25,000) ..... by Paul W. Fairman 8

Illustrated by David Stone

If Mary Winston had anything, it was the kind of skin you love to touch. But maybe that was the one good reason for changing it

THE LION'S MOUTH (Short—6,000) ..... by Stephen Marlowe 44

Illustrated by Paul Lundy

The space invaders used a weapon far more horrible than the hydrogen bomb. They used our most treasured possession to annihilate us

THE MAN NOBODY KNEW (Novelette—10,000) ..... by Don Wilcox 56

Illustrated by David Stone

Everybody knows enough to beware of a man with a violent temper. But the Zattzones of Venus were much more explosive when they quietly smothered their smoldering anger

MORTALITY UNLIMITED (Short-short—7,500) ..... by Russell Branch 76

Illustrated by L. Sterne Stevens

When a healthy young guy goes into the teleport machine and comes out looking like raw hamburger, something is either mechanically wrong, or the man at the receiving end is hungry

ASK A FOOLISH QUESTION (Novelette—15,000) ..... by Milton Lesser 92

Illustrated by Tom Beecham

There was only one way Gregory Jones could beat the death rap: by killing himself first. But the trouble with such a move was that it wasn't always fatal

Front cover by Walter Popp, illustrating a scene from "The Woman in Skin 13"

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The Editor's Notebook

A CONFIDENTIAL CHAT WITH THE EDITOR

POPULAR interest in science fiction has been steadily increasing for the last five years, hitting a soaring high during the last year—and still rising.

WHY THIS rapid up-hill awareness of science fiction as a field of literature? From what does the rise spring?

WE BELIEVE that science fiction is a natural result of the type of world ours is turning into. Up to 1900, approximately, we didn't have *one* world—or even *one* nation. What we had was a vast network of small unrelated groups—each working independently, and blindly, toward a central unit. For example, it took months before the citizens of California knew the results of a national election—results in which, it is unnecessary to add, they were vitally concerned. Today, through the medium of radio and television, they can hear the counts as they are being called off. Oscaloosa and Oslow are now as far apart as your nearest radio dial, or telephone cable.

THE INCREASED speed of transportation has increased our ability to converse with other people. The telephone has changed our entire way of life. The airplane, the telephone, the radio and television—even now these fabulous developments are beginning to be outmoded.

"Of course the formula is in a safe place. It's in my wife's purse."

AS AN EXAMPLE, the idea-men are already speaking of floating radio stations which will be able to throw sound for 1,000 miles. With such a unit, it will be virtually impossible for any one group to remain in a state of complete isolation. The "Iron Curtain" will be an impossibility.

WE WILL have to learn an entire new way of life—or else. Is it any wonder, then, that with the rapid pace of change all around us—changes which will result in a difference in our physical environment and in our entire concept of thinking—we turn to science fiction—the fictional projection of what our future living may conceivably be like? After all, jet propulsion, television, and the artificial heart were common-talk-in-science fiction as far back as 1930, and even before that.

SAM MERWIN walked into our offices the other day with the July copy for the *AMAZING STORIES* Book Review feature. At the same time, he threw a short story on our desk.

"WHAT DO you think of this one, Les?" he asked us. "It's the first science-fiction-fantasy piece I've done in some time."

"WELL..." we started.

"NO, TAKE your time. I'm not one to insist on a fast decision. I'll just sit here and wait."

WELL, SAM'S one of the nicest guys we know, but we sure didn't want him sitting there in front of us for two weeks while we waded through the pile of manuscripts already sprinkling our desk. So we read his first.

AND OF course we didn't have to go far into it before we saw we had a real winner. "One Guitar" is a thrilling stf short—the story of a girl who had a Martian mother and an Earthman father—and we're delighted to be able to present it to you in the July *FANTASTIC ADVENTURES*. ..... LES

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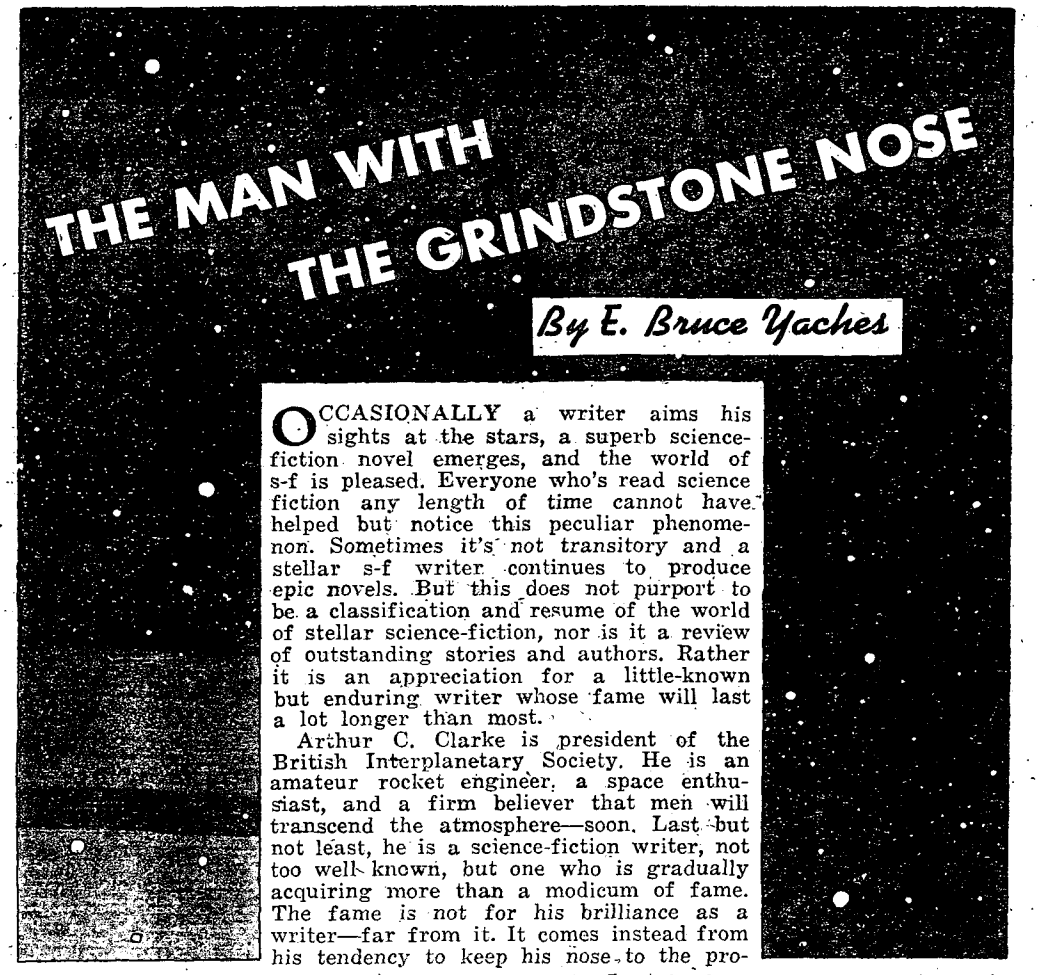

THE MAN WITH THE GRINDSTONE NOSE

By E. Bruce Yaches

OCCASIONALLY a writer aims his sights at the stars, a superb science-fiction novel emerges, and the world of s-f is pleased. Everyone who's read science fiction any length of time cannot have helped but notice this peculiar phenomenon. Sometimes it's not transitory and a stellar s-f writer continues to produce epic novels. But this does not purport to be a classification and resume of the world of stellar science-fiction, nor is it a review of outstanding stories and authors. Rather it is an appreciation for a little-known but enduring writer whose fame will last a lot longer than most.

Arthur C. Clarke is president of the British Interplanetary Society. He is an amateur rocket engineer, a space enthusiast, and a firm believer that men will transcend the atmosphere—soon. Last but not least, he is a science-fiction writer, not too well known, but one who is gradually acquiring more than a modicum of fame. The fame is not for his brilliance as a writer—far from it. It comes instead from his tendency to keep his nose to the proverbial grindstone. Mr. Clarke is not interested in epic science fiction or in super-atomics, or in stellar flights to Andromeda. All he wants is for men to get to the Moon and to Mars and Venus, and his stories and writings reflect this passionate desire with tremendous force.

Three of his writings are without question the best he's done. *Interplanetary Flight, Prelude To Space, The Sands of Mars,* are the commonplace, innocuous titles of three thin books which summarize something that hasn't yet happened, but will, one day.

The first is a semi-popular, semi-mathematical treatise on the rudiments of rocket flight. Here, compressed and condensed, are the answers to all the important technical questions about interplanetary flight down to the last rivet in the rocket. When the book appeared it made no great splash, yet already it has found its way onto the shelves of every amateur and professional rocket enthusiast alive.

The second, the simple story of a trip to the Moon, similarly is the last word in what must be paradoxically called authenticity.

The third is an equally simple and well-fact-founded story of the colonizing of Mars.

Clarke's technique has been this: how will men go about these first journeys? What will they eat, wear, do, think, plan, construct, etc.? Then, by a pure process of logic, he reduces these cold facts—or facts-to-be—to ideas presented through very ordinary human beings who act and react to these hypothetical situations. The result is that when you read Clarke, you're aboard the ship, you're navigating it, you're breathing the canned air. The people of the future who stumble on Clarke's stuff won't react as we do to, say, that of Verne or Wells, with a sort of tolerant, half-smiling "...it's just a little dated, now...." Instead they'll say, "This boy knew what he was talking about...!"

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the Woman

The two zants stiffened—their bodies like rock—as the charges from Mara's gun hit them.

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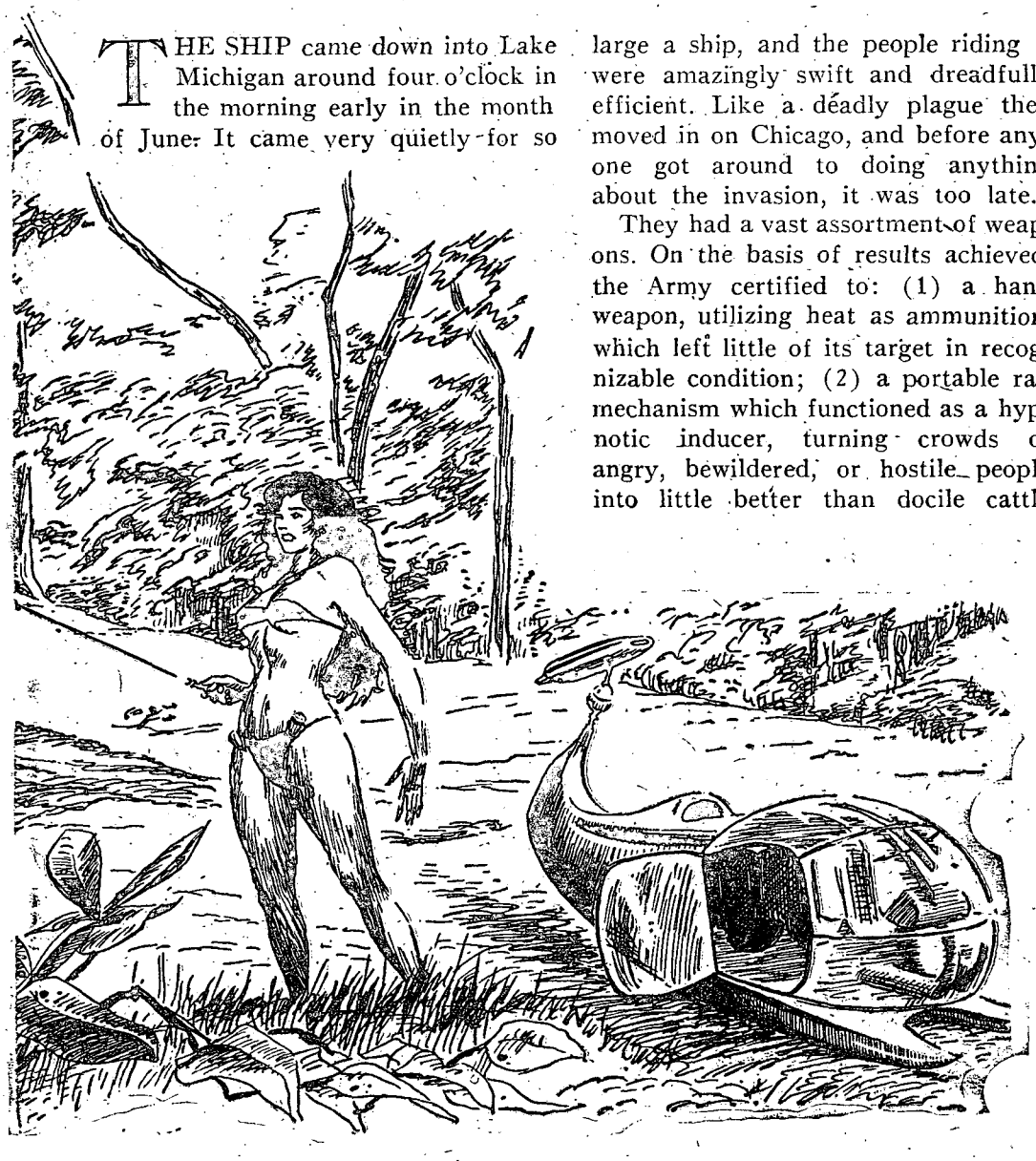
in Skin 13

By Paul W. Fairman

To do this job in the best Mata Hari tradition, was to incur a "fate worse than death". But Mary Winston was a girl who had a lot of faith in fate

THE SHIP came down into Lake Michigan around four o'clock in the morning early in the month of June. It came very quietly for so large a ship, and the people riding it were amazingly swift and dreadfully efficient. Like a deadly plague they moved in on Chicago, and before anyone got around to doing anything about the invasion, it was too late.

They had a vast assortment of weapons. On the basis of results achieved, the Army certified to: (1) a hand weapon, utilizing heat as ammunition, which left little of its target in recognizable condition; (2) a portable ray mechanism which functioned as a hypnotic inducer, turning crowds of angry, bewildered, or hostile people into little better than docile cattle



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herds; (3) some device for doming over a given area under a thickness of vibration—probably ultrasonic—capable of prematurely exploding any missile known to the Army. This curtain was also lethal.

The invaders obviously moved by a carefully preconceived plan. Their first objective was the complete ejection of native population from a prefixed area—this area being the City of Chicago and suburbs, to a perimeter of farm land, forest, and open country. They were markedly humane during this operation, killing as few of the residents as possible, and showing every consideration so far as was practicable to the aged, babies, mothers, small children, and cripples.

They were chillingly inhuman in their insistence on complete evacuation, even to the sick from the hospitals and the insane from asylums both public and private. They were masters in the art of swift, competent administration, achieving the complete evacuation in less than two days; protecting themselves the while from outside attack, and carrying out every detail of the invasion and ejection with an efficiency beyond belief.

The nation seemed to rally to its own defense with a surprising lack of panic and disruption. This, however, was probably the fault of the invaders themselves, the swift completion of their self-appointed and seemingly impossible task having had a shattering effect upon the mind and morale of the people; thus causing a state of stunned bewilderment that could easily be misinterpreted as quiet courage.

The rallying and the counterattack had little constructive effect, however. It resulted in nothing more than the drawing of a tight military ring around the invaded area.

One got the uneasy impression, however, that the tight circle was allowed to exist only by courtesy of the invaders; that it was tolerated because they did not desire—at least at the time—to expand their holdings.

Their defense perimeter was so solid and impenetrable as to constitute complete isolation of the invaded area. No branch of the American government even pretended to know what was going on inside the perimeter.

The period of invasion, evacuation, attempts and complete failures at counterinvasion, lasted somewhat over two weeks. During the attempted counterassault, the intruders made no hostile gestures other than those of defending themselves. And finally the Army was forced to pause and reconsider—much as a stunned and bloodied man must pause and reconsider after butting his head against a stone wall.

The invaders, according to the refugees and the counterattackers, were of two colors. The males were of a violet hue; the females, all the same shade of green. Physically, both sexes were, according to Earth standards, magnificent specimens. They wore little clothing, but seemed entirely comfortable even in the comparative chill of night and early morning.

That was about all anyone knew of them—or so the general public thought.

MARY WINSTON had been on call for over a week when her phone rang. To a C4 agent, "on call" meant staying home within reach of the telephone, until summoned to headquarters. Mary had spent periods as long as thirty days in this boring state. But under present circumstances, the inactive week had seemed like six months.

Her call came at one p. m. on the eighth day. She snatched up the phone

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and tried to sound impersonal; tried to keep the elation out of her voice.

"This is Mark Clayton," the voice said. "We're ready for you."

"I'll be right down."

"Twenty minutes?"

"Ten."

The answer might have been a chuckle. "Fine. Come straight to my office."

Mary overestimated her own speed by two and a half minutes, but there was no censure from the chief as she entered his office.

Mark Clayton looked young for his job. Head of C4, the top echelon of Government Intelligence, the department always depended on him when the going was toughest.

He put his pipe into an ashtray and said, "Sit down, Mary. I don't think they're quite ready for us yet. We'll use the time for a short preliminary briefing."

Mary Winston had not spoken as yet. She took the chair indicated, crossed her ankles, and waited. Mark Clayton let his eyes travel slowly downward, from her blonde head to the brown-and-white pumps she wore so effectively.

An observer would never have suspected these two had dined and danced together not two weeks before; that Mark had kissed Mary good night and had been kissed in return. The look in his eyes as he surveyed her now was impersonal, calculating, analytical.

He said, "We have a job that fits you to a T. This is a clause-five proposition, though. I wish you'd turn it down."

A clause-five job was one which came under certain of the small type in an agent's commission; a job entailing hazards which an agent was not required to undergo.

"I've never invoked the clause yet, Mr. Clayton," Mary said, "and I never intend to." *Mr. Clayton!* That wasn't the name she'd used the night she'd kissed him back. But they'd been two other people at the time. Now they were chief and subordinate, and one of the basic requirements of an agent was a sense of proportion.

Mark sighed. "No, you haven't. Nor did I expect you to this time. My statement was just a required formality."

MARY DID not reply. But in her mind there was a certain satisfaction; a knowledge that she affected him more than his casual front indicated.

She remained silent and Mark said, "We've gotten a break in Chicago."

"I'm glad."

"Maybe I'm optimistic in calling it a break. Let's say we've been given a slight advantage that we may be able to turn into a break. It depends on you."

"I'll do my best."

Mark's smile was fleeting, barely perceptible. He said, "It will entail your removing your clothing and going around practically naked."

"If it's necessary, I can do that too," Mary replied evenly.

Mark sat down behind his desk, tipped his eyes to the ceiling, and began talking. "About a week ago, one of the females of the Chicago invaders strayed outside their ray-curtain. Our men captured her. She was brought here. She's in the building now.

"We drugged her and put her under the monitor. In two days we had everything we could get from her: a broad though somewhat sketchy background concerning her race and where she came from."

"Nothing of their plans and objectives?"

Mark frowned. "She didn't know a

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great deal about that; only that they plan to stay."

"Did you learn anything of their weapons?"

Mark shook his head. "No. She appears to be one of the foot soldiers straight out of the ranks. She knows how to use both their hypno-ray and their heat weapon, but she hasn't got the foggiest notion of what makes either of them tick."

"I take it then that both males and females are active fighters. Are they rated equally?"

Mark smiled. The twinkle in his eyes was almost personal. "It would appear that the female is rated the higher; that is, if we haven't underestimated the girl's ego."

Possibly this was supposed to draw a spark, but it didn't. After a moment, Mark went on: "You probably have a pretty good idea already of what your assignment entails."

"The one I'd naturally assume presents obstacles. You said these people had a definite and unmistakable coloring."

Mark arose from his chair. "Let's go on with the second phase of the briefing."

He led Mary through an inner doorway and down a long corridor. He stopped finally and opened another doorway. They entered a small room in which two other people awaited them.

"You've met Prof Halley," Mark said.

"Of course. How do you do, Professor."

Halley's bright eyes took Mary in with appreciation and complete lack of impersonality. "Hello, darling. Long time no see. Have they picked you for this suicide run?"

Mary smiled. Halley was a fussy little chemist—privileged as all geniuses are privileged—and the people who knew him lost the ability to be offended at his frank eyes and franker speech.

"That's what they tell me," Mary said.

HER EYES moved naturally to the fourth occupant of the room. A girl lying wide-eyed upon a table, covered from the neck down by a white sheet. The sheet outlined a long, symmetrical body with which any Earth girl would have been delighted. Also, the contours of the finely molded face met all Earth standards of feminine beauty.

Only the complexion set this female apart. It was of a soft apple-green. Strangely, it was not repulsive. Rather, the effect was that of an exquisite and beautiful mask over a lovely face. The only unpleasant touch—the only flaw—was in the open, staring eyes—unnatural, vacant. But this did not detract too much from the perfection of the over-all picture, because one sensed that the resulting expression *was* unnatural.

Without preamble or ceremony, Professor Halley jerked the sheet from the girl's body, revealing uncovered symmetry and the soft, apple-green coloring broken only by two white bandages around the thigh of the left leg.

Professor Halley chuckled in delight. "This one was a lulu. Really a lulu, but I licked it. By heaven I licked it! In less than a week I analyzed the pigmentation, got a formula in only thirteen attempts, and made up a dye that's identical in every respect. The dye stands up even under ultraviolet."

Halley's boasting was excusable in that it was more an expression of delight than of ego. He turned to Mary, surveying her critically. "And now, darling—if you'll just shuck off your duds, we'll get to work."

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A little of the sudden fright within her mirrored through Mary's eyes. "You mean—"

Mark stepped close and laid a hand gently upon her shoulder. "There's still clause five," he said.

Mary stiffened. "I wish you'd stop implying that I'm afraid of this assignment. I'm just asking that it be put into plain words. I take it I'm to be dyed green."

"Not now—not this minute," Halley said cheerfully. "There's some preliminary work. Measurements, so we'll be absolutely sure you fit the physical requirements; skin tests, so we won't be floundering around in the dark when we do the actual dying job. But there isn't too much time, darling. Get your clothes off."

Mary glanced at Mark, her look eloquent. She had no great objection to stripping before Halley, not if it came in the line of duty. There was something entirely sexless about the little chemist that made for a lack of embarrassment. But Mark . . .

The C4 Chief understood. "I'll run along and leave you in the Professor's hands. Come back to the office when you're through."

He left the room without looking back. Halley bent over and picked up the fallen sheet, tossing it to Mary. "You can strip behind that screen," he said unconcernedly. "Then take the other table."

Mary went behind the screen, and as she undressed she saw Halley leaning over the green girl, minutely studying a section of her breast under a large reading glass.

TEN MINUTES later, after exhaustive measurements had been taken, Mary also lay upon a table with Halley's high-powered glass trained upon her skin. Halley seemed delighted with what he discovered.

Halley said, "The dying job will be a cinch. The least of your worries. The important thing is whether or not you'll have the mental strength to retain your own personality under the conditioning."

"Then they plan to go—all the way?"

"Of course. Anything short of that would be more dangerous than the calculated mental risk. You see, we're in the dark concerning these people. They may have ways of learning true identities that we know nothing about. The only answer is to *be* the party under whose colors you're masquerading."

Mary smiled in spite of herself as Halley stepped back and laid down his instruments. "That's all for now. I'll make some lab checks, but things will work out fine."

He was now bending over the green girl, and called after Mary who was dressing behind the screen. "Oh, darling, I forgot to tell you. You'll be in bed, blindfolded, for two days. That's when we'll inject the deeper shade of green onto your irises."

Suddenly Mary wanted to get out of the room. Ready to leave, she brushed past Halley and deliberately avoided looking at the green girl.

Once in the long corridor, she stopped to compose herself. She stood for a moment biting her lip; sternly telling herself she wasn't afraid—that it was just the strangeness, the newness of the assignment. Possibly she did not convince herself, but there was no sign of faltering as she marched into Mark Clayton's office.

THERE WAS a delay, however, before she completed the act of entering. A voice over Mark Clayton's interoffice visiphone brought Mary to an unconscious halt with the well-oiled door open only slightly.

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Mary was not given to eavesdropping, but the incident was precipitated so suddenly that she found herself doing it without thinking. Then, a few moments having passed, she hesitated to either back away and let the door close, or to enter Mark's office. Now she became lost in the conversation beyond the door.

The President of the United States was saying, "The news from the Army is pretty bad, Mark. I get the feeling we're absolutely at the mercy of these creatures."

"They seem satisfied with what they have, sir."

The President's voice was a trifle sharp. "That sounds to me like the wrong attitude, Mark. Chicago is an American city—remember? They threw American citizens out bodily—"

"I didn't mean it that way, sir. I consider it an advantage in that it gives us time. Acceptance of the situation is of course out of the question."

The President seemed mollified. "Oh, I see. Well, you've got a point there."

"I've got more than that, sir. I've got the girl we need. Halley just phoned me that the tests are favorable. We'll have her in their camp within a week."

There was a pause. Then, "I don't know, Mark. I'd say it's a long shot; a tremendously long shot."

"Of course it is, sir—but—"

"Does she know about—the other half of the plan?"

"No. I haven't told her. By the way—what's the latest on the South American bloc? Any word?"

"None at all. It looks to me as though the fools consider this action a break in their favor—as though they are still playing Earth politics. We can't, of course, bid for a healing of the rupture. With Asia tottering in the balance, that would be suicidal."

MARY COULD visualize Mark biting solemnly upon the battered stem of his pipe. "I'd say our only hope is to solve this Chicago problem and regain our territory. For some unaccountable reason, the whole world seems to view it as our personal misfortune. They don't view it as a world threat at all."

"I think I know the reason for that."

"I'd appreciate hearing it, sir."

"They think we can contain and lick it. Regardless of present alignments, we're still looked upon as the first world power. They're all afraid of us. Even Sargo wouldn't dare attack openly."

"But the longer these attackers from outer space hold Chicago, the lower our stock falls on the world market. We've got to get in and find out something about them."

"You're absolutely sure of your operator?"

"I'd back her to the hilt," Mark said.

"And you're sure complete conditioning is a good idea? What if our scanners aren't able to penetrate that ray curtain of theirs?"

"It's a calculated risk, sir. But I've checked exhaustively with our top brains on the subject. They say it can."

"Very well, Mark. I'll leave it up to you. Keep me posted."

Mary pushed open the door in exact coincidence with the fading of the president's image on Mark's videoscreen. Mark looked up and gave her a brief, impersonal smile. "All finished with Halley?"

"For the time being."

"Fine. Sit down. I hope he wasn't too rough on you."

Mary dropped into a chair. "No one minds Professor Halley. He's a—

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"She'll do fine," the professor mused as he peered excitedly at the girl on the table.

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I guess you'd call him a character."

"That about sums him up. Have you decided you want to take this assignment?"

"I was never in doubt."

"Then I'll really get down to brass tacks. As you've of course figured out, we plan to dress you in an attractive shade of green and send you behind the enemy lines. We've got to find out the nature of the weapons holding us helpless. We've got to get some data on the plans of those beautiful green and purple people. We've got to go on the supposition that they have a weakness. And we've got to find that weakness."

"I'll do my best."

Mark frowned, hesitated. "I want you to undergo complete conditioning, Mary. There's so much at stake. I'm not saying you couldn't achieve your objective without it, but—but we don't know these people. We don't dare underestimate their cleverness."

"I'm perfectly willing to go all out."

Mark got up suddenly, rounded his desk and took Mary's hands into his own. "Sometimes I get sick of this thing called patriotism—this doing the job in spite of heart, hell, or high water." He dropped her hands and took a quick turn around the room. "I wish you weren't an absolute natural for the job. The only agent we've got with both the looks and the brains."

Mary smiled at him, and a trace of tenderness slipped into the smile. "Let's get on with it, Mr. Clayton."

COMPLETE conditioning. Mary lay on a cot under a white sheet. Beside her lay the beautiful green girl. Between the two cots was a compact, though complicated, unit which had been rolled in on four rubber-tired wheels. It was in the complete charge of two white-coated young men who had impersonal efficiency written all over them.

One of the young men sat before a board covered with dials, a headset over his ears. He touched the dials at various times and with various pressures.

The other young man held a position at the upper ends of the cots, giving concentrated attention to the two subjects. He wore a stethescope which he applied to each chest periodically, checking against a large second-dial on the wall. At intervals he took from his vest pocket a pencil-light that flashed a rhythmic beat when pointed at the flesh under the subject's eyelids.

Nearby stood Mark Clayton, taking in the scene in brooding silence.

Complete conditioning. The transfer of an entire consciousness-image from one mind to another. The creation of a complete new personality in one brain pattern, superimposed over the memory, the subconscious, and the conscienceness in the brain tissues of the receiving subject. The taking of a brain-picture from one skull and its secure anchoring into another.

The creation of mental twins with the aid of new science.

Mary closed her eyes and deliberately composed her features in order that the panic in her heart be hidden. She was familiar with the implications of complete conditioning, but this was her first actual experience as a receiving subject.

She comforted herself with thoughts of the scanner. It was a sure antidote. The scanner would always reflect her true personality. And when it was all over, the scanner would...

FOR THOUSANDS of sectors, the *Narkus*—great self-sufficient steel world that it was—had swung in a wide orbit through space. Unnumbered sectors, during which time the old Ar-

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gans had died; new ones had been born; honored genealogies had been established.

A religion had sprung from the fiber of these people and a history supported their dignity. And the history and the religion were curiously intermingled. It was written in the book that: *In the beginning there was Argan, and much strife, because certain of the tribes became stiff-necked and contemptuous of their brothers.*

And the time when bitterness and hatred caused the tribes to split asunder and death and destruction lay over the face of the land.

And a time when evil triumphed over good and the good were driven into hiding while their gods forsook them.

And a time when the revered fathers of the beaten tribes put dirt upon their own heads and went in to the caves to pray to the gods.

And a time when the gods heard the prayer of the fathers and took them by the hand and led them to a great cave.

And a time when the gods said, "We will not forsake a just people. Call into this cave your enlightened sons. Bid them build a world of steel four hundred times larger than the little worlds in which you ride above the land of Argan. Bid them labor long and hard, and during the time of the building your gods will protect you from the hatred of your enemies.

And a time when the fathers rejoiced in this favor from the gods and called in all the good and just technicians—all the good and just scientists—all the good and just laborers who came and rejoiced also at this favor from the gods...

MARY WRITHED under the disciplinary pain of the conditioning. Her eyes opened and she saw Mark standing by. Mark? Who was Mark? Glan, that's it—not Mark. Then the sickening horror of realization.

Glan was dead.

She closed her eyes. The white-coated young man lifted her left eyelid, and for a moment she saw the room blurred and out of focus.

She heard quiet voices—voices filled with concern—but none of them was the voice of Glan.

Somebody said, "Anything wrong?"

"An overcharge."

"What does that mean?"

"It could mean any of a dozen things, but it's probably the result of too strong an ultrasenic feed. This is a delicate process, Mr. Clayton. It doesn't go by blueprint. We have to feel our way at times."

"Be careful. Please be extremely careful."

There was no answer, only the subdued hum of the conditioner and the breathing of the white-coated man leaning over Mary. Mary's legs, the muscles across her abdomen, the cords of her neck, had stiffened. Now they relaxed. The sense of peace returned....

AND A time when life in the great cave spanned several generations. But the good and the just people never lost faith in their gods and the gods kept faith with the good and the just. And this was the Second Epoch.

And a time when the new world was finished in all its mighty, steel-ribbed glory, and there was great rejoicing, although the revered fathers who had talked with the gods were long dead, and the first technicians and scientists were dust in the lower caves. But still the good and just people rejoiced because the instructions of the gods were clear. The revered fathers had written them down carefully in the book.

And a time when the book was read

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to the good and just people in the great cave. "Call your finest technicians into the new world which shall be called Narkus, and bid them plot a great orbit of four hundred thousand and ten segments. This orbit shall be plotted from the cosmic position of the day the revered fathers first put soil upon their heads and prayed for guidance."

And a time when this was done and all the other things were done that the gods had directed and all the good and the just people entered into the Narkus and started off on the great orbit as directed by the gods. And this was the Third Epoch.

MARY SHUDDERED as a wave of nausea brought her own personality back into her conscious mind. She heard a quiet voice: "Careful—an overcharge."

The humming of the machinery lessened. Mary opened her eyes and found them focused on the profile of the green girl lying on the cot next to her. The girl's eyes were closed and her breast rose and fell evenly under the white sheet. "Is she—suffering?" Mary asked.

"No. She is completely unconscious. The receiver is the only one who experiences any discomfort in a conditioning."

"Will she suffer any ill effects?"

"No more so than a person sitting for a photograph. We're merely taking a picture of her mind—or, rather, transplanting it."

Mary closed her eyes. "I must be a poor receiver. I'm causing you a lot of trouble."

"No, the contrary. It's going very well."

Mary wondered if Glan was still in the room. Glan? No, a different name. But who could it be except Glan? Again the hum of the machine. . .

IN THE history and heritage of the Argans—nay, even in their religion—was a time in the future when the sealed pages of the book would be opened. This was known when the *Narkus* first settled into the great orbit—was known by people who would never live to discover what the sealed pages contained.

The ones who would witness that pivotal event were called the chosen ones, and were deeply grateful for their good fortune.

The news was given out by the leaders and all the citizens of the *Narkus*—some thirty-odd thousand souls—gathered outside the central temple to hear the words of wisdom. One of the leaders opened the book and read:

"Within forty segments of the great orbit, you will come to a family of planets moving around a yellow sun. The great orbit will interlock with the orbit of one of these planets. It was so ordained when one of the revered fathers had a deep dream in which the gods spoke to him. He took the dream to the good and just scientists and it was interpreted by them and the great orbit was plotted from their interpretation of the words of the gods.

"This planet will be your future home. Thus will the Third Epoch begin.

"For full three thousand sectors, you have been trained in what you are to do. You are in the hands of your leaders. Our blessings go with you."

And there was great rejoicing among the people.

And more. Wild rumors flew thick and fast through the *Narkus*. Word was that the leaders had decided to ignore the instructions in the book and find a different world. No one knew why.

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And word had it that the leaders had made contact with intelligent beings on the planet and were invited to make a home there.

The first rumor was proven groundless when the *Narkus* did set down on the huge water body on the new planet. And the second rumor was disproven when the natives gave no welcome. Surely they had not been invited.

MARY OPENED her eyes. The hum of the machine had ceased. The green girl lay sleeping on the other cot. Mary said, "I—I feel quite normal. Was the conditioning a failure?"

Only one of the white-coated specialists remained. "On the contrary. A complete success. Do you feel strong enough for a short briefing?"

"Of course."

"You are now under the scanner. As long as it is set to your brain vibration, the new personality and background will remain entirely subconscious. In short you will feel entirely normal. The scanner is effective from a distance of two hundred miles. It will remain much closer to you than that at all times.

"Certain instincts—certain commands—have been hypnoted into your subconscious which will dominate when you are under the influence of your new personality. When you are under the influence of that personality, you will have no memory of your true entity. It will be while you are under the influence of the new personality that you will acquire—or attempt to acquire—the information your superiors must have.

"At certain set times each day, your subconscious will be scanned from beyond the perimeter of the area under siege and the information recorded. During the periods of scanning, you will return to your true entity wherever you are."

The specialist paused as though making sure he had missed nothing. "Is that quite clear?"

"Yes."

"You seem doubtful."

"Over another point. I'm not convinced all this was necessary. I could have been given the scannings from this girl's mind through hypnotics. I see no reason why I shouldn't have entered the area equipped with my own entity."

"The reason for that, I believe, was your own personal safety. The invading race must be of a high order. They will have methods of checking a suspected spy. Infallible methods. To the best of our knowledge, complete conditioning defies all detection."

"I see."

"I believe Mr. Clayton is waiting for you."

PROFESSOR HALLEY was in an excellent mood. "You will step into this tub, my dear."

Mary dropped the sheet she'd held around her and slipped down into the tub of dark green liquid. Halley stood back and looked on with the air of a celebrated chef who had just finished concocting a new and savory soup.

"Twelve formulae," he chuckled. "Then the thirteenth and success. Are you superstitious, my dear?"

"No, but this stuff is pretty hot. I may be parboiled."

"No danger of that. And when you come out, you'll be the gaudiest thing outside the city limits of Chicago. The woman in skin thirteen." Halley took time out to chuckle. He repeated the phrase. "Quite good, don't you think? I'm sharp today."

"You're always sharp, Professor. How long will this take?"

"About an hour."

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Halley inserted the plugs deep in Mary's ears. Then he saw to the tubes through which she would breathe during complete submersion. The cap came next. "We'll do your scalp separately," he said. "A very delicate operation."

Then he sealed Mary's eyelids with a narrow strip of gum. This done, he pushed her completely under.

She lay there in pleasant isolation. The liquid cooled and she grew drowsy. She tried to isolate and identify the presence of the scanner ray and could not.

Then her mind went back to the conversation she'd heard outside Mark Clayton's doorway. One particular part of it flared brightly in her memory:

"Does she know about—the other parts of the plan?"

"No, I haven't told her."

This was the first time Mary had had an opportunity to ponder on the cryptic words. They could mean only one thing. There was something in this situation the high brass knew but refused to state even in private conversations. Mary's experience told her the reason for this seemingly unnecessary secrecy. In this day of brilliant scientific research, men never knew whether or not they were really alone. There were ingenious instruments. There were highly trained and conditioned spies who knew how to use the instruments.

The only place top secrets were discussed were in the soundproof, lead-lined booths in which not more than three men could sit at a time.

Yes, there was something the high brass knew that they weren't telling.

MARY WALKED up to the full-length mirror and stood gasping. She was naked except for the brief feather costume that had been worn originally by the green girl.

But now Mary herself was the green girl. The cosmetic specialists stood by holding photos taken at various angles. Professor Halley wore a self-satisfied smirk. "A complete success in every detail. No one could possibly tell them apart. We've a right to be proud of ourselves."

Mark Clayton was standing by. He removed his pipe from his mouth to say, "We haven't got too much time. We'll give you a few hours to get used to yourself. Then we head for Chicago."

"I'm ready," Mary said. She glanced again at the mirror. "It *is* a rather nice color—and a nice name, too. Mara—Mara Zo."

Mark Clayton grinned ever so slightly. "Are you single, Mara? Or do you have a husband back in Chicago?"

Mary turned startled eyes. "I—I'm single, of course."

"I agree with you," Mark said, "it's a very nice name. Let's go."

TWENTY-FOUR hours later, under cover of darkness, a small group crossed an open pasture in the heart of the farmland southwest of Chicago. The group consisted of Mark Clayton, two military aides, and a beautiful woman—a woman almost naked, whose green coloring was not visible in the darkness.

"Right about here," one of the military men said. "Their screen is about a hundred feet ahead. They've got one of those bat camps over on the other side of the pasture. They'll see her lying here come dawn."

There was no time for much in the way of goodbyes. Mark squeezed Mary's hand. "This is it," he said. "You know what you've got to do. As soon as they come for you, we'll turn off the scanner. Then we'll pick you

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up for an hour every night at ten."

Mary returned the pressure. "Goodbye, Mark."

"So long—Mara Zo."

IT WAS very peculiar. Two *zants* were holding Mara's arms. She was standing in open country near a *zor* roost and the *zants* had her, but she could not remember where she'd been or how she'd gotten to the open country.

Both *zants* were grinning, still unable to believe their good fortune. "It's her all right," one of the *zants* said. "This is a fine day for us, Bon. The reward will be great for this one."

"It will take a great load off the minds of the leaders—getting her back. They will probably execute her immediately."

"And reward us greatly. Careful—she's full of tricks."

The first thing Mara asked herself, of course, was: *Is it safe to think?* Could she bring her mind out from behind the protection of that silly historical background for a little while and use it for that for which it was intended?

She looked off toward the *zor* roost and saw only *zants*—out in the early morning for sport on the *zors*. No *gorts* were in evidence to pry into her brain with their powerful telepathic tentacles.

Feeling temporarily safe from them, she uncovered her mind. What could have happened? The last thing she remembered was breaking away from a squad of *zants* taking her out for execution. Escape inside the ray-cap was impossible, so she'd used the mental key and had gone outside.

The *zants* were now hauling her across the pasture toward the big round roost. Others of their kind had stopped activities to watch. Even though she herself was a *zant*, Mara's lip twisted in contempt. The fools! The weak, spineless, mindless fools!

But Mara had no time to indulge in the luxury of a sneer. Furiously, her mind went back to her personal problems. Desperately, she probed her memory, seeking to fill the gap. But there was nothing there; nothing but the certainty that there *should* be something.

She had used the mental key—no; possibly she should go back further than that and try to establish a running continuity that would carry through....

After the white visitor—the native of this planet—boarded the *Narkus*, information had leaked out concerning his talk with the leaders, and the Resistance had flared into the open. It had been put down brutally, of course, and the leaders had had their way—the way of involving the Argans in the coming war on this planet.

THE LANDING had been made before the Resistance tried again to gain control; the results were bloody. Mara remembered hiding in the huge deserted buildings in the city—hiding until one of the small party had dropped his mental block and the mind tracers had found them.

Running—ducking here and there like hunted animals. Glan shot down—running—running; then, out through the ray-cap.

It was no use. Mara hit the memory block again. Something had happened. She was sure of that. Something had to have happened. Possibly she'd been captured and her memory pattern blocked out back to that point.

No—these strange pale people did not have the science to accomplish such things.

Mara and her captors had arrived

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at the *zor* roost now. Many of the *zants* had given over their sport and were packed close around in stupid wonder.

Mara's captors were being very self-important. "Stand back there, please. Stand back now."

"We have captured a very important prisoner."

"The leaders will want us to bring her to them immediately."

"Stand back."

And from the gathering, Mara could hear the low comments:

"They will be rewarded."

"...praised by the leaders."

"...given special dreams."

And Mara's heart bled for her people.

But she had little time to ponder on the broad, ancient tragedy of the *zants*. Her own worries were more pressing. While crossing the pasture, she had become aware of strange urges, new desires, and they perplexed her.

Why, for instance—with death facing her in the very near future—should she feel the urge to know what made the ray-cap work—the scientific facts behind the hypnotic blaster and the various ray-guns?

Far more important to try and escape from the two *zants* who were leading her to her doom. One of them pushed her roughly into an air sled. They got in on each side of her while the groups around them dispersed and went back to their sport. Already several *zors*, with *zants* tight in the saddle behind the huge, leathery wings, were looping and darting above the pasture.

One *zor* bulleted straight upward until its contact-sense told it the ray-cap was close. The *zor* reversed and went into a perpendicular dive, pulling out a scant fifteen feet from the ground, to angle horizontal with a fearful neck-snapping jerk.

NOW THE air sled lifted and started toward the cluster of tall buildings to the east. Mara turned her eyes on the *zant* at the controls. "You expect them to give you good dreams in return for my capture?"

He nodded. "Good dreams."

"But not the best."

The other *zant* leaned forward to get into the discussion. "Why not the best? You are a very important traitor."

"Because they no longer have the best dreams—or any others. The Resistance raided the boxes one night during the last uprising. We hid the dream pellets in a place of trees to the north. No one will ever be able to find them. And it will take months to make more."

The *zant* at the controls frowned. He was of a delicate violet hue and was handsome, as were all the male Argans. That was the trouble; sometimes you couldn't tell a *gort* from a *zant*, because the former often adopted the child-like, stupid attitude and bearing of the *zants*. These two were not *gorts* however; of that Mara was sure. A *gort* would never indulge in childish pleasures, such as riding *zors*.

"I am one of your kind," Mara said. "Why do you take me in to be killed?"

The *zant* at the controls thought it over, his lower lips protruding, as from intense concentration. "You caused trouble," he said finally.

"Yes—but for the benefit of all of us. The *gorts*—since the two tribes joined forces long ago—have used the *zants* as slaves—have exploited us."

"The *gorts* are favored by the gods," the left *zant* cut in. "They built the steel world in which we crossed space. They allowed us to

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come with them, lest the other tribes of Argan kill us all."

"They want us in order to dominate! They really hold us in the contempt we deserve." Mara's voice deepened in bitterness as she allowed her mind to flare full force—entirely forgetful that it might be picked up by a mind tracer. "You've seen them cut us down in cold blood—you've seen how they crushed the last Resistance uprising."

"That's because the *zants* taking part were bad," the air sled driver said in the chiding tones of a child. "The *gort* leaders know what is best. They allow us our *zors*—they give us dreams."

MARA GROUND her teeth in an agony of frustration. Was it worth while trying to save a people too stupid to know they were being used? Was it merely a losing game, fighting eternally against a force too broad and too intelligent to be beaten?

"They give you bats and dream pellets," Mara said, her voice husky with contempt. "The playthings of children."

"But we like *zors* and dreams. When one likes a thing—"

"*Why* do you like them? Because the *gorts* put mind-stunting chemicals in the dream pellets. You think they give them to you because you ask for them? That's not true. The *gorts* know you will ask, but if you didn't they'd insist you take the pellets. Without them your minds would develop. That's how the Resistance was born. A group of us got together and swore to stop taking the dreams. Our minds grew strong and we could think for ourselves and see the *gorts* as they are, before they knew we weren't taking dreams. They tried to force us, but it was too late. We had built mental strength and could overcome the drugs."

The two *zants* listened stolidly. One of them said, "The *gorts* read to us out of the book. They tell us of our great heritage, of our—"

"The book!" Mara spat. "A pack of lies concocted by the *gorts*. You know what we of the Resistance think of the book? We use it for a mind shield!"

"Then we didn't come from Argan—in the beginning?"

Mara turned wearily to the *zant* seated on her left. As she did so, she noted he was paying little attention to the controls; that, or else he was slowing the sled down deliberately. A spark of hope glittered in her mind.

"Certainly we came from Argan," she said. "But most of the rest is lies. The text is colored so that even the truthful parts are twisted around."

The other *zant* hadn't seemed to be listening. Now he said, "Are you sure you stole all the dream pellets?"

"Why do you ask?"

He looked at the driver of the sled. "It just came to me. We haven't been given our ration of pellets. We should have gotten them yesterday. The *gorts* were never behind in the distribution before."

"Listen," Mara said, in sudden desperation. "Will you join the Resistance? Will you stop taking the pellets and become strong of mind? Then you'll see what the *gorts* do to your people. The knowledge comes with the new strength. You'll realize they take your women and use them like animals—for their own unspeakable pleasures—that your men are killed and tortured daily in horrible laboratories where they carry on their brain experiments."

There was no response. "Don't you *want* to grow up? Do you want to remain children until you die?"

"Are you telling the truth? Did

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you really steal all the dream pellets?"

Mara saw it was no use. There was a moment of silence broken only by the purr of the drive unit in the sled. Then she turned to smile at the driver. "Yes. Even the ones they give out for special merit; the ecstasy dreams they would give you for capturing me."

THIS WAS something beyond the ordinary—beyond the routine. Both the *zants* puckered their brows as they pondered it.

Mara said, "So I am in a better position to reward you for letting me go than they are for taking me in. I'll give you all the ecstasy pellets—all of them."

It was a terrible temptation for the type of minds which rode with Mara. The *zants'* eyes glowed. There was eagerness in the handsome, purple faces.

"It would be wrong," said one.

"Very wrong," the other stated.

"Ecstasy pellets. All we want."

"All we could ever use."

"You could hide them," Mara suggested, "and have dreams for the rest of your lives."

"That would be wonderful."

"Or give them to your friends and get much praise."

"Where are the pellets?"

"In the wooded land to the north. Point the sled forty-five degrees to your left. I will tell you when to change it."

"We are not agreeing, of course," the driver said firmly.

"I understand."

"No, not agreeing," the other assured her—and himself.

"We will just look at the pellets."

"Make sure they are there."

Mara promoted no more conversation. The urge to do inexplicable things was again strong within her, filling her mind. One of the strongest urges was to locate the native who had met with the leaders here. She was suddenly thirsty for knowledge concerning him; something more solid than the rumors she had heard.

Hearsay in the Resistance had it that this planet, called Earth, was not the charted destination of the *Narkus* at all; that the leaders had hove to from curiosity before going on. While inside the atmosphere, they'd made contact—or had been contacted—by this mysterious native—who sought the aid of the Argans in a strictly planetary war.

It was through this native's instructions that the landing had been made on the water near the city. Now the *gort* leaders were waiting, ready to trade the lives of many *zants* for whatever advantages they could get. Rumor had it also that the natives slipped in and out of the city at will. As a matter of fact, Mara herself had seen a pale stranger hurrying into the *gort* headquarters housed in a huge building called the Palmer House.

Too, Mara wanted to know about the weapons of the Argans; wanted to know technical details she had never cared about before. A deep-seated uneasiness laid its grip on her mind. There was something wrong—something different—some change had come over her—

"Two degrees to the left," Mara said. Then, a few moments later, "Wing over to that clump of trees. You'll find a small open space. Lower into it."

The *zant* set the sled down carefully. Then both of them jumped to the ground. They made no effort to hide their eagerness. "We'll just inspect them—make sure," one told the other.

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"That's right. It wouldn't be honest to take any of them."

A HALF-SMILE of pity pulled at Mara's lips as she walked swiftly toward a thicket to the south of the platform. The *zants* followed trustingly.

Mara dropped to her knees beside a thick bush and thrust her hand in toward its roots.

"Ecstasy tablets—imagine that," one of the *zants* said. "I've only seen one in my whole lifetime."

From the corner of her eyes, Mara caught the other *zant* looking speculatively around. She knew that already he was searching for a secluded thicket in which to hide himself for the dream.

Mara turned suddenly, coming to her feet in the same motion. In her hand was a small gun.

The eyes of the *zants* widened. "A para-tube."

"We—I don't understand."

Mara pressed the switch. There was only a slight buzzing sound; no fire, no visible rays. But the two *zants* stiffened, then tipped over like a pair of beautiful purple statues. Swiftly, Mara bent down to examine them. Their flesh was hard as rock. The gun had thrown an excellent charge. She'd gotten it from a cache placed there against such an emergency as this, and the Resistance had been careful to steal only the best weapons.

Mara regarded the *zants* with a queer mixture of affection and pity. "Sleep well, my babies," she whispered, and thrust the small ray-tube into her bra—into the slight valley between her breasts.

Scarcely had she drawn her hand away when a voice said, "That's fine. Leave it there—and don't move."

TWO MEN sat in a small, lead-lined booth in the White House. One was the President himself, his face worn and haggard, his kindly eyes crow's-footed deeply. The other man was Mark Clayton.

Mark said, "We've kept a close check on him. There's no doubt in my mind that we have the right man."

"I wasn't thinking about that," the President said. "It's—well, the whole plan that worries me. I have a feeling it should have been handled differently. For instance, sending the girl in. I'm still not sure—"

Mark took the stem of his battered pipe from between his teeth. The pipe was cold out of consideration for the narrow quarters. "As I saw it," he said, "she was absolutely necessary—as a decoy. Something to occupy his mind and to make him show his hand. He'll have to get in touch—warn them. That alone will verify what are now really nothing more than suspicions on our part."

"And if we're wrong—what about the girl? Then she's been sacrificed."

"I can't agree. If that comes about, it's still an honor so far as she's concerned. A job for her country. And if this angle hadn't entered into it, the basic job is still there to be done. We need information—technical data. We need it badly."

The President sighed. "You're right, of course. Guess I'm just a small-town politician. Can't get out of the habit of thinking in terms of the individual."

"I understand. But I keep remembering this is war. One of our cities is in the hands of alien invaders. Such a situation cannot be tolerated."

"You still have the male in a safe hiding place?"

"Yes—another case in point. It cost us eight American lives to get him."

"Who will handle—"

"A very competent man," Mark cut in. "We have a lot of competent men. There won't be any leaks and it won't

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be a complete conditioning job."

"Then you'll be gone for a while."

Mark smiled. "As short a while as possible."

"Goodbye. Take care of yourself."

"Thank you, sir. I will. Goodbye."

MARA'S first thought was that she had nothing to lose. Therefore she might as well take a chance and ignore the command. But then she turned her head and saw the *gorts*—two men and a girl—with their heat guns trained dead center.

Mara revised her thinking. She did have something to lose. The time between this moment and the hour she would be executed if she allowed herself to be taken.

By facing three heat guns with a para-tube, she would most certainly commit swift suicide. She turned slowly and the girl stepped forward. She jerked the tube roughly from Mara's bra, bruising the green skin. Mara steeled herself and did not wince.

There was no physical difference between the two *gort* males and the paralyzed *zants*. The difference was spiritual—the radiation from within. The *gorts* were sharp of eye—quick of movement. And there was a grimness in their makeup which was the complete opposite of the open, childlike attitude of the *zants*.

Nor were they interested in dreams, although their first question concerned the pellets. One of the men came forward and took Mara roughly by the wrist. "It might go a little easier with you if you tell us where the pellets are. Where did your mob of traitors hide them?"

Mara smiled coldly. "So you're really worried. It *was* your total supply. And a pretty smart job on our part, wasn't it?"

"Smart? Stupid audacity, I'd say. And we'll find the pellets too. It's just a matter of time. I was just trying to show you an opening for possible leniency."

"Don't exert yourself."

The *gort* girl was regarding the stiffened *zants* with a look of disgust. She transferred the look to Mara. "Brutalizing your own kind, eh? It's about what we'd expect from a traitor. This proves the ideals you spout about are pure hypocrisy. You're interested in your own hides first, last and always."

"Are we going to stand here all day?"

One of the men motioned to the other. "Get the sled. We'll wait."

"Let's use this one," the girl said. "We can send somebody back for these two. They'll be stiff for hours."

THEY HERDED Mara into the air-sled, one of the men taking the controls while the other man and the girl kept their heat guns trained expertly. And again came Mara's thirst for technical knowledge. She stared at the heat gun in the purple man's hand. What made it work? From whence came the crackling power that burned through steel? Somewhere in the building of the leaders the information could be found. They'd certainly possess records. Mara wondered about the possibility of getting her hands on them.

Then she laughed inwardly. How foolish! She wasn't going to get her hands on anything. Before too long she would be a pinch of blackened dust from facing those same guns.

Ahead, the tall buildings of the central area by the lake sprang closer as the air-sled shot forward like a small rocket. As they rode, Mara felt the almost imperceptible tickling within her head, which indicated the crossing of a brain tracer path. Instantly, she cleared her mind and threw up a

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screen—just in time.

A minute passed, then the tracer came nosing back—seeking her out—seeking to check the suspicions aroused during the brief contact. It tingled for a full minute against her barrier, then went on its way.

Now the area of closely packed buildings was below. The air-sled settled onto a broad roof. Guards were there to anchor it, and Mara was led down a stairway and into an elevator.

One of the male *gorts* had remained above, leaving her in charge of the girl and the other man. Five minutes later, they faced a handsome, purple man over a huge desk. Mara cringed inwardly in spite of herself, for this was Morn—one of the most dreaded of the leaders—Morn, in charge of military operations and the putting down of rebellions.

Tales were told of him—his savagery with both men and women; savageries in both business and pleasure. Mara could well cringe.

Morn looked her over with an almost impersonal contempt. He allowed his eyes to rest upon her loins and then her breasts with what was obviously studied insult. He was silent for some time, dominating the room with his silence. If the captors of Mara expected praise, they were doomed to disappointment.

WITHOUT glancing their way, Morn finally snapped, "Throw her into the jail downstairs with the rest of her kind. When we get a little time we'll have a grand killing. I'd like a few more gathered in first, though."

Mara had been waiting for queries relative to the location of the dream pellets. Either Morn had already found them—through mental weakness on the part of a captured Resistance member—or else his silence regarding them was a tribute to Mara. Possibly he knew it was a waste of time trying to break this girl down.

Mara was taken from the office and back to the elevator. Her captors opened the door just in time to block the entrance of a native—a small, worried-looking little man with pouting lips and an almost feminine cast to his eyes.

Entirely preoccupied with his own thoughts, the native brushed past the trio. But a peculiar thrill ran through Mara. Her interest in the native flared even above thoughts of her coming death.

Then he was gone, the door was closed, and Mara was being led toward the elevator.

Her second thrill came in a long, low passageway—underground—which seemed to lead into another of the tightly packed buildings. There, the trio came upon four *zants*—two males and two females—busy scrubbing the stone floor.

But only apparently busy. Mara knew immediately the business of cleaning was only an act. She knew also that Glan had not been killed—or even captured. Because Glan was one of the four—the one kneeling near a pail over which was laid a scrubbing cloth.

The rescue was achieved with cold, mathematical precision. At just the right instant, Glan reached under the cloth, into the bucket, and came forth with a heat gun. As though having been carefully rehearsed, the remaining three lunged forward, hitting the two guards low and knocking them to the floor.

Mara, her help not needed, plunged on past Glan, out of the heat gun's range. The three rescuers, after knocking down the guards, reversed directions with agile speed, to roll, sprint, and crawl out of range also.

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Then they turned to watch Glan do his deadly work. While the guards clawed desperately for their weapons, Glan's gun spurted a thin stream of white-hot flame. The bodies of the captors shriveled under the intense heat.

But they made no outcry—because Glan's heat gun stream cut first at their throats, severing their heads—sending their heads rolling on the hard floor.

SWIFTLY, silently, Glan continued his terrible work, spraying the heat stream, reducing the captors' bodies to smaller and smaller piles of residue until nothing was left but some charred bone.

Now Glan snapped off the gun, and the bone residue was quickly swept up by the other three Resistance members and deposited in pails. And so carefully had Glan used the heat gun that not a mark showed on the stone floor.

The grim, savage annihilation now finished, the party took up their buckets and moved off down the corridor, their skill and forethought demonstrated in the fact that a bucket had been provided also for Mara.

They did not move swiftly; rather, their progress was remarkably slow; their eyes dull and lifeless; their manner almost that of children.

Down, down they went, ever deeper into the basements and subbasements of the huge building. Nothing was said—no words passed—as each member of the group played a part.

In a lower passage they encountered three *gort* guards, all male, each carrying a brace of heat guns and each wearing a deep scowl.

The *zants* shuffled to a halt, stepped aside, and stared dully at the *gorts*. Mara's acting was as clever and convincing as that of the others. But in her heart was a greater tension—a tension coming from long hours of fear and a sense of anticlimax. She hoped the *gorts* would continue on their way. She was disappointed.

The lead guard hesitated, then came to a halt. "Where are you going?"

A long moment of silence, after which Glan mumbled, "To empty the pails. The water gets dirty. We must have fresh water."

The *gort* grunted contemptuously, then shrugged. As the trio moved on, Glan broke the silence again.

"Good dreams."

The *gorts* did not deign to acknowledge the greeting, nor even to look back. When they were out of sight, Glan indulged in the luxury of a grin. "It's not far now," he whispered, and the shuffling forward was continued.

They came to what appeared to be a grating over a sewer drain. "Here," Glan said, with urgency.

The two males lifted the grate. Then the members of the rescue party lowered themselves swiftly down through the small opening. Mara followed Glan, to find utter darkness, terrible odors, and a distasteful softness under foot.

"It will smell better before long," Glan said. He took Mara's hand and led her through the darkness to a place where lines of light showed in the wall. Glan tapped on wood and a crude panel opened into a large cement room.

Glan turned and smiled at Mara. "Welcome," he said. "Our new headquarters. The natives had a railroad under their city once. It went into disuse and was apparently forgotten. The *gorts* don't know it's here."

Glan's manner changed now. Gone was the impersonal ruthlessness. While the other Resistance members went swiftly away to find business elsewhere, Glan put his arms around Mara

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and laid his head on her shoulder. Then he raised his head and Mara did the same thing, laying her head eagerly against Glan's neck.

"I missed you," she murmured. "I thought you were dead."

Before Glan could reply, Mara did a strange, unexplainable thing. She drew Glan's head down and placed her lips against his. She saw his eyes widen in blank surprise while—far above, and unheard by either of them—the clock in the Wrigley Tower boomed ten times.

MARY STIFFENED as she realized she was in the arms of a strange, purple man; that her lips were against his lips. She was disturbed by the feeling that she was in those arms from choice. She was on the verge of jerking away when memory came to her rescue.

Somewhere out beyond the deadly perimeter of the space-invader's invisible shield, a mind scanner had been turned on—a scanner tuned to her individual brain wave.

Smothering her surprise by gargantuan effort, she smiled at the violet man and began drawing back very slowly. He made no effort to hold her. His face reflected surprise, bewilderment.

"Why did you do that?"

"Do what?"

"Place your lips against my lips. What does it mean?"

An unconscious blush warmed Mary's face, hidden fortunately by the apple-green complexion. Swiftly she realized there must have been a moment of merging between the two personalities as the scanner brought her own to the fore. A merging in which the inclination of one governed the instinctive physical actions of the other.

"I kissed you," she told him, smiling archly.

"Kiss? What is kiss? What does it signify?"

"I—I saw the natives do it while I was away."

ONLY HALF of Mary's mind was centered on the conversation. The other half was busy realizing the scanner had begun its work. She wondered if it was getting any information of value. Where had she been? What had she done? Who was this purple man whom she had just kissed?

Of course the scanner was taking all this information out of her subconscious, but that did her little good personally. She sensed, however, that this must be a first meeting between Mara and someone she loved. It had all the urgency of a first meeting. Had any confidences been exchanged? Had any information been given back and forth?

She hoped not, and she knew definitely that none must be exchanged until the scanning hour had passed. The face of the violet man had cleared somewhat of surprise. Rather, the surprise had been pushed into the background by more pressing emotions. "Tell me," he said eagerly. "Where did you go? What happened?"

In Mary's mind was the desperation of not having the least idea. She contrived a smile and passed a hand lightly over his face. The face was feather-smooth. "No—you tell me first."

"Very well. When we got trapped out there in the woods—"

The trap Mary was thinking of was the one she'd fallen into herself—right here in this strange room. Any information he gave her would be lost from the standpoint of personal value. He must be side-tracked for an hour.

Mary knew of but one possible way to do this. She would steel herself to it, she thought—wondering vaguely at

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the same time just how much steeling would be necessary; and how much skill would be needed to ward off the ultimate. She took a deep breath and smiled, cutting the purple man off by laying a finger over his lips.

"Can't it wait, darling? It's been such a long time?"

He frowned. "*Darling?* That's a new term. It wasn't in the hypno-indiction they gave us on the language."

"I heard that from the natives, too. It's a love term. It is used by those dear to each other. Did you like the kiss?"

"The kiss?"

"The meeting of the lips. When I saw it, it looked . . . interesting."

She drew his head close and repeated the kiss, hoping it would serve to keep this peculiar man's mind diverted. If she had any doubts, they must have come from underestimating her own ability in that direction. The man caught on quickly.

Mary felt a moment of panic. She could divert this fervent character with a new trick—maybe a couple of tricks, characteristic of the races on an individual planet. But the ultimate end was no doubt the same on all planets. And maybe he knew a few tricks of his own.

Mary smiled and put her arms around the violet man's neck and kissed him again. He was getting the knack of it; getting the knack too quickly to suit Mary.

I wonder who he is? she thought.

MARK CLAYTON stood under the dim light of a sickle-moon and inspected his squad. There were four of them. They were—as was Mark himself—almost without clothing and expertly stained in a beautiful shade of violet.

And there was some of the griping to which all men of military bent are entitled. "If we had to be invaded, why didn't the Eskimos do it. I feel like a jay bird."

"Quit moaning. You'll probably be dead in a week."

"Maybe so—but I'll bet I'm *warm* then."

"Quiet," Mark said. "Final briefing."

The men came closer. Mark said, "The initial scanning of the agent already inside reveals she saw our boy entering an office in the Palmer House. It didn't reveal much else except that she's located in the basement of that building—the agent, that is.

"As you know, our technicians have found some tunnels in their lethal curtain. The openings aren't large enough for invasion purposes and seem to be caused by certain rock formations. In spots where the surface is rocky, the curtain doesn't quite touch the ground. Our experts are studying this further, but that's not our affair. While they're studying, we wriggle in under the curtain and try for several objectives. One—we'd like to kidnap our boy and get him out of there so we could score a big win in the way of world opinion. Second—I've got a relay on the scanner. It will be lifted on signal so we can find our agent and be on tap to take advantage of any information she uncovers with the aid of the underlying personality."

Mark stopped speaking. There was a pause before one of the men growled. "Mother naked, and not even a table fork to fight with."

"We have to go unarmed. There's no place on your person to hide a weapon. This is a battle of skill and brains—not weapons. We wouldn't have a chance with ours against theirs, anyhow."

Mark paused. "Any questions?"

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THERE were none. The men moved in single file toward a rocky knoll out across the flat land. They reached the knoll and found a single technician squatting there awaiting them. In the dim light a chalk-marked path could be seen winding over the rock pile, following the line of a depression caused by some underground fault.

"That's it," the technician said. "You crawl along that line and you'd better scratch the hell out of your bellies rather than raise your fannies an inch more than necessary."

"Ouch," one of the men muttered in anticipation.

The technician seemed fascinated. "Lord—but you're a gaudy lot. Hope the rains don't come and wash your purple lipstick off."

"It's on for good," one of the men countered. "We caught one of them walking rainbows and copied the color of his underwear: It won't come off."

"You guys are going to freeze your—"

Mark had been studying the contour of the hill. "All right men," he cut in. "Let's hit it. I'll go first."

"Happy landings," the technician said lightly. But there was a tightness to his lips—a tension in his muscles giving the lie to his outward casualness.

Mark went down on the cold rock and started wriggling forward. The rock scratched cruelly, but this annoyance was shouldered out by the knowledge that death lay a scant inch above the highest point of his anatomy.

He did not look back, but he knew the men had fallen in behind him—four segments of a human snake. Slowly he wriggled forward. The air was cool, but sweat beads appeared on his forehead.

It seemed hours later that he cleared the rock knoll but he kept on going, belly down, across the open pasture-land beyond. One hundred yards in, he decided he must take a chance. That or crawl on his belly clear through the suburbs and into the Loop. Slowly he came to his feet.

Turning, he looked back to see the three prone figures close behind him. "It seems to be all right," he said.

But his mind and eyes were upon a single still form lying in the pathway on the knoll, rearward. The other three men came to their feet and looked backward also. There was a period of dead silence; silence one of the men finally broke with the grim remark: "Joe must have stuck his fanny up."

By common consent, they turned away. Nothing could be done for Joe. It would be suicide to approach and touch the still form.

"What's on the agenda now, Chief?" one of the men asked, turning away.

"We look around for a bat roost. There's one about a mile south of here."

"What for?" There was bewilderment in the voice.

"To get a ride to the Loop. On the basis of the memory pattern we picked up on the scanner, we four are going to be *zants*. That's new information. It seems the subject we captured had a pretty strong mental block. All we got back in Washington was a history of their trip across space that we know now was mostly fiction."

"*Zants*. That's a hell of a name. It rhymes with ants in pants."

"There seem to be two cliques in this setup. The ups and the downs. The *zants* are the downs and the *gorts* are in the saddle."

"Speaking of saddles—they got any on those damn bats?"

"You shouldn't have too much trouble. The main thing to remember is to: look stupid—feel stupid—be

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stupid. That makes you a *zant*. If we run into trouble, just let your mouth hang open while I do the talking. Let's go."

"Just the opposite of the razor ad," somebody said, and the party started off across the rolling land.

THE TIMING had been arranged so that the sportsmen might possibly have not yet arrived. There had been nothing in the scannings to indicate this one way or the other, but it seemed logical.

They arrived at the huge round roost, and Mark allowed himself a moment to wonder at the ingenuity necessary in the swift assembly of the globes. Then he gave off wondering as a *zant* lying asleep by the entrance to the roost came erect, rubbing his eyes.

Mark was tensely alert. There could be trouble here—and danger; possible detection even before the foray had gotten a good start. Nothing in the scannings had indicated whether or not the *zors* were individually possessed or were common property; whether permits were needed, or whether there were set hours for the sport.

Observation had indicated some riding was done at night. Mark moved on that assumption.

The sleepy *zant* said, "You've come for a ride?"

"We got restless—couldn't sleep. We made up a party." Mark stood poised on his toes awaiting negative reaction. There was none. The *zant* yawned again. "I'll wait for the yellow sun to come up," he said. Then he lay back down and went to sleep.

Mark motioned and the party pushed on into the roost. Dim light bulbs on the walls gave sufficient illumination to show rows of great ugly birds, remindful of vultures gone wild in growth, sleeping on bars bisecting the globe.

"No saddles," one of the men whispered, "but there are a lot of bridles on these pegs."

"I wonder how you get them to come?"

"Maybe you pull the rope on their leg. See? They've all got a rope hanging down. We can reach the bottom ones."

One of the party was doubtful—highly so. "Why wouldn't it be smarter to just walk into town?"

Mark replied. "Because we might run into trouble. We don't know the setup well enough. But we do know they ride these things all over and don't seem to be challenged."

Mark went forward, grasped one of the hanging ropes and tugged at it. The bird took an ugly head from beneath its wing, looked down, croaked an obscenity. "Come on, boy—come on," Mark crooned.

IT ALMOST appeared as though the bird shrugged in resignation. It didn't, of course. It merely hopped from its perch and stood waiting with complete docility while it croaked swear-words in *zor* language.

"Hand me a bridle," Mark said.

The bridle was pushed forth and Mark held it up. The bird opened its beak; but whether to yawn or receive the bit wasn't entirely clear. Mark slipped in the bit and the *zor* lowered its head exactly like a well-trained horse.

"I should have known they'd be well-trained," Mark muttered. "These *zants* wouldn't be able to handle them otherwise."

Having set the pattern, Mark surveyed—five minutes later—his squad lined up in the pasture, each somewhat fearfully astride a bird, hard

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behind its wing roots. He climbed onto his own bird and raised his hand. "Follow me," he called, and dug in his heels.

The *zor* gave forth an indignant cuss-word and flailed the air with wings that lifted it into a smooth upward glide. One after another, the rest followed.

Over the tree tops, Mark experimented with the bridle, hauling back on the bit. Immediately, the *zor* levelled off and skimmed swiftly eastward. Mark risked turning to look backward. Everything seemed to be going smoothly. Swinging his eyes forward, he picked out familiar landmarks in the semidarkness below and strove to pierce the gloom for a first sight of the tall Loop buildings.

Then an odd interior tickling penetrated his consciousness; a tickling seemingly inside his skull. It resembled nothing he had ever before experienced, but his instincts sounded a warning; his intincts didn't like it.

That in itself was enough to generate an additional alertness. Therefore he was waiting, tense and expectant, when the hum of an approaching drive unit cut through the sky. There was a hostile tinge to the sound.

Then, the clumsy-looking flying platform was upon them. A harsh voice barked: "Set your birds on the platform. You have ten seconds. Do as we say or we'll burn the lot of you."

MARA LOOKED into Glan's eyes and experienced a feeling of having had a mental lapse. It was peculiar. Had some unknown experience outside the ray-cap affected her mind?

Glan leaned forward and placed his lips on hers. Mara jerked back, startled. "What—what are you doing?"

He gazed at her, slack-jawed. "What do you mean—what am I doing? You showed me how."

Something told Mara not to press the point. Deeply troubled, she said, "We've been wasting time. Tell me what has been happening since I saw you last."

Glan released her and backed away, shrugging. "Very well. As I was saying, when we were trapped in the woods and you broke through the wave-cap, I fell over a rock and was sprawled out helpless."

"I thought they'd killed you."

"Falling probably saved my life. They captured me and began asking questions about the dream pellets. About fifteen minutes later, one of our roving squads came to my rescue. We gave you up for lost until today when the word came down you'd been seen going into the military leader's office. Then we laid our plans quickly."

Glan stopped speaking and stared at Mara curiously. "You've changed somehow. I can't quite put my finger on it, but you are...different. What happened during the segment you were away?"

It was Mara's turn to be startled. "The segment?"

"More than that—closer to one and a micro. What happened?"

"I—I can't remember. There is a complete gap between the moment I looked back and saw you lying on the ground, and the time I was seized by the *zor* roost. I don't know *what* happened."

Glan scowled. "I'd say they'd done something to you—something to your mind. But you're no different, really. And besides, they haven't the skill."

"Tell me what happened here?"

"They've been trying desperately to get the dream pellets back. They're afraid of trouble before new ones can be brewed. Already we've lost seven

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members to the heat guns."

Mara leaned forward and laid a hand on Glan's arm. "That native—have you found out anything about him?"

"Nothing more than we knew; that he comes in and goes out under guard to have talks with the leaders. We think he's trying to get technicians to go to some far section of this world and train the natives in making our weapons. Our leaders are holding back for several reasons. They don't think it wise to give out the secrets, and they are wondering—if the natives are so stupid—why they can't take over the world themselves."

"The fools, there aren't enough Argans to do that regardless of our weapons. We've hardly enough to hold this miserable little bit of land."

"The native has them about convinced of that. He tells them, according to our secret scanners, that there are over a billion people on this planet."

MARA'S INTENSITY increased. "Glan—isn't it time to strike—make a stand? Let's gather all our forces and try to take the Palmer House. We'd catch them by surprise because we've never made a real attack. Thy expect us to keep on sniping."

Glan smiled again. "We've needed your enthusiasm, Mara. We've missed it a great deal."

Mara paused. Again those unreasoning urges. Was it sharpened instinct speaking deep within her? Or something else. She said, "Glan, we must gather up all our hidden weapons and put them in one place. We must do it immediately. They're of no value spread all over the country."

"Where will we put them?"

"With the dream pellets. The *gorts* haven't found the pellets, so that must be a pretty good place."

The violet-colored man got up and began pacing the floor. Suddenly he stopped and faced her. "Oh, what's the use, Mara. You're the only really strong one in the Resistance. The rest of us are permanently stunted by the dream pellets; secretly we long for them, and I know many would go back with the slightest excuse. Let's give it up. We weren't meant to overcome the *gorts*."

Mara sprang to her feet, eyes blazing. "We won't give up. In fact, we're closer than ever. I have a feeling something will happen, Glan. We mustn't quit now. We can beat them and take the *Narkus*. Find an uninhabited world as we were meant to do."

"We couldn't run the *Narkus* if we had it."

"No—but we can make the *gorts* run it for us."

Glan threw up his hands in despair. "Why, even now I think there is treachery in our own ranks. I wouldn't be surprised if our own side turned us in."

There was irony in the fact that the secret knock sounded that very moment on the panel. The door opened automatically from release by an attacked mechanism. Four members of the Resistance entered the room, followed swiftly by three *gort* guards. "There they are," one of the *zants* said. "And remember—the four of us get complete pardons for turning them in."

THE *GORTS* on the flying platform would have been amazed to know in advance how small a chance they had. Their disadvantage came from over-confidence; from disbelieving the scanner.

They watched the four riders swing their *zors* in toward the platform. The

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clumsiness of the riders should have been a warning, but the *gorts* saw only what were obviously four *zants* out for a night ride. Their plan was to frighten them, as befit men of authority, and let them go.

Mark and his men dismounted, acting out the role of stupidity to perfection. This until they were within arm's reach of the *gorts*. And it was then that the intruders learned what a small chance they had.

The struggle was short and furious, but the fury was mainly on the side of Mark and his men. In a matter of seconds, one of the *gorts* had a broken leg and a ruptured pelvis. Another was unconscious from a split skull. A third screamed at the pain of an arm broken at the socket, and the fourth stood uninjured, in stunned surprise staring at his own gun in the hands of Mark.

"Don't hurt this one," Mark said. "I want to ask him some questions."

"What if he doesn't speak English," one of the men wanted to know.

The *gort* was no coward, basically. Mark saw the purple eyes light up in the rays from the pilot board on the platform.

"I want to know where your arsenal is," Mark said.

The *gort* stared in simulated wonder; then pointed to his own lips.

"Don't give us that," Mark said. "You were all hyno-conditioned to our language. Talk."

One of Mark's men stepped forward. "I'll make him talk."

Mark stepped back. The man moved in swiftly. His hands made swift motions, almost too fast to follow. The *gort* doubled over, emitting a choked scream. "He asked you a question," the man said.

"We have no central arsenal except on the *Narkus*. And that's really not an arsenal. It's a manufacturing plant."

"Does the ray-cap emanate from a central point?"

"No," the *gort* moaned, holding his stomach. "It comes from twenty-five hidden outlets around the circle. You'd never find them. Besides—who are you? From the Resistance?"

THE MAN who had opened the *gort's* mouth grinned wickedly. "You've no idea how big a resistance, bub." He turned to Mark. "What now, Chief?"

Mark didn't answer for a full twenty seconds. He stood staring at the sky-line over the Loop. Then he snapped his fingers. "I think I've got it. The big answer!"

"Shall we dump these rats overboard?"

"No. We need this platform and one *zor*—no, wait a minute." Mark stepped to the control panel and studied it swiftly. "We won't need a *zor*. This thing has radar. Hook the four birds together by their reins and put a *gort* on each one—"

"A *gort?* You mean that's the name of these purple characters?"

"Yes. You—" Mark pointed to the able-bodied leader. "Get on the front bird. We'll strap the others into place with the hand straps and then you're on your own."

Several minutes later, the *zors* spread their wings and slipped off into space like an aerial pack train. As soon as they had cleared the platform, Mark returned to the control board. "This doesn't look too complicated," he said.

He moved one of the control rods. The platform swung too far around. He made an adjustment and the platform purred toward the Loop sky-line—dark against the false dawn.

One of the men opened his mouth to speak. Mark gestured. "Quiet—

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there's something coming in."

They knew Mark was now listening to the tiny receiver built into a silver-lined pocket near the base of his skull. They were silent for several minutes while Mark listened and the platform slid toward the Loop.

"The scanning has been completely analyzed," Mark said finally. "Things begin to look up—maybe. We've got to locate some people, but first we follow through on the brainstorm I just got."

Mark found the platform controls relatively simple. He angled up and went over the Loop at a high altitude while he and his men shivered in the cold night air. Then he angled down sharply.

He had been surprised at the lack of alertness from below; surprised that he was allowed to come down to the surface of the lake without being challenged. The platform touched the surface and Mark braked the unit almost to a halt, allowing it to inch slowly forward toward open water. When the radar clicked, he allowed it to move another ten feet, then stopped it completely.

"Hold on the alert 'til I get back," he said. "I want to check something. I won't be gone more than five minutes." With that he dived overboard. He swam some few feet further toward open water, then went under in a flurry of purple legs.

AS THE WATERS of Lake Michigan closed over his head, he felt the peace of utter isolation. But he had not come here for peace. He swam lakeward with long, even, underwater strokes until he judged he could safely go no further. Then he reversed and went back as he had come.

The going got tough toward the end. His heart pounding in his ears sounded like a series of explosions. Finally he could stand it no longer and shot to the surface. The fact that he was still alive to take in a gulp of blessed air told him he had come up inside the ray-cap. And he'd learned what he'd wanted to learn.

Also, he now learned something else. The explosions in his ears had not been his pounding heart. A spotlight from above was centered on the platform—rather, on the place the platform had been. Now there was nothing there but a spot of boiling, steaming water. And the heat was fast spreading in all directions; so swiftly that Mark, well outside the circle of the spotlight, found himself taking a warm bath.

He turned north and started moving away with long, powerful strokes. He had gone perhaps fifty feet when a voice, close by on his left, called out, "That you, Chief?"

Mark recognized the man as he pulled close. "Where are the others?"

"Gone. Crisped down to nothing. They didn't give any warning. They just blasted away. I took a long jump and was lucky. They got it right there on the platform."

Mark said nothing. There was nothing to be said. He continued swimming northward and the last man in his squad fell in beside him. "Where we going, Chief?"

"To a place up by the river mouth—a location given me in the scanning report. I want to look it over."

They swam for an hour and were not challenged, and came finally to a place where the still, dark hulks of several old-model submarines reared into view. The early false dawn was fast becoming reality now, and Mark increased the beat of the stroke to a point where his companion was laboring.

Then the submarines were above them. Mark rounded the first one and went in beside it to the hidden

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ramp, waited for the other to come up beside him.

"Let's rest a while, Chief. I'm about beat."

"Sure," Mark said. "We want to be ready. Don't know what we'll find inside."

Their heavy breathing had subsided somewhat when Mark said, "You stay here. Cover my rear. I'm going inside."

HE WENT up the ramp on tiptoe. Dim light came from the hatch in the conning tower. Mark peered inside. All was quiet. After a minute he went quietly down the ladder. Halfway down he stopped abruptly as he came within sight of two purple males and a green female asleep on cots. This was a breach of conduct, he was sure. At least one of them should have been awake.

But he was glad of that breach. It gave him the opportunity of making a quiet exit. He went out as he had come—tiptoed out of ear shot and took a tiny transmitter from under his loin cloth.

There was no necessity of setting it or establishing contact. He knew the people waiting for him to come in wouldn't be sleeping. He spoke in a whisper, "How long since you scanned me?"

The reply came instantly into the receiver in his skull. "An hour and a half, sir."

"Then the hunch I had was right. I've proven it out since. Pass the word along to the proper authorities. But tell them to hold up until I give the word. I haven't been able to go ahead on Project Friendship yet. I'll report."

"Yes, sir."

"And throw the scanner on 497X immediately."

"Yes, sir."

"That's all."

"Good luck, sir."

Mark put his transmitter back into its hiding place where it had already chafed off a sizeable piece of skin.

MARY AWOKE with a start. But there was a hand over her mouth, so her cry was smothered in her throat. She opened her eyes to see a handsome purple face close to her own. She tensed her muscles for a struggle.

But then the purple man spoke, whispered into her ear: "It's Mark. Quiet! I've come to help you. Let's get outside quietly."

They went to the ramp where Mark's companion sat hunched over. He looked up startled. "It's all right," Mark said. The man sank back.

"Mark!" Mary whispered. "I don't understand. What are you doing here?"

"I came in to follow anywhere you led through this damn maze, and to cash in on any information you got. That was part of the original plan, you know. But I couldn't tell you earlier. Didn't want it in your mind in case they scanned. But now we have to work together."

"Did I get anything important?"

"Plenty. There's a Resistance here. The top men sitting on the majority—holding them down through a mind stunting process. Some of this lower mob—*zants* they're called—have kicked over the traces. I've got a plan, but you've got to stay under the scanner for a while."

"It will be a pleasure," Mary said. "And you know something?" She swayed close to him. "I'm damn glad to see you. If that's unladylike—make the most of it."

He grinned and kissed her swiftly. Then, "What's your layout?" he asked.

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'There's a purple male I seem to hang close to. I think he's Mara's sweetheart. He's in the Resistance."

"I want to talk with him. Let's go inside. Do you get my pitch, or do you need briefing?"

"I get it. Let's go."

Mark glanced down at his subordinate. "Cover our rear."

Mary went down the conning ladder and Mark followed her.

ONCE INSIDE, Mark awoke the men, then stepped back, watching them narrowly. One evinced great guilt almost instantly. Mark quickly centered his attention upon the other.

Mary said, "Wake up, I have news. This is one of the natives. He came through the ray-cap to help us beat the *gorts*."

The purple man stared in blank surprise. Mark said, "Hello, Glan." He checked the man's face for reaction and the reaction was satisfactory. "Mara has been telling me about you and the Resistance. We kept it secret until now, so you wouldn't have it on your mind if you were scanned. We will help you defeat your enemies and thus defeat our own."

Glan had nothing to say. He was still bewildered. He looked to Mara for guidance. "We got the guns here in time then," he said. "Is that what you had in mind, Mara, when you said we should bring them here?"

"Of course," Mary smiled. "But there are other things to be done. We must cut off the ray-cap."

Glan frowned. "But, Mara—you know that's impossible. We'd be killed before we could—"

Mark knew, of course, that Mary was groping. She'd groped in the wrong direction. "Mara is just overenthusiastic," Mark said. "It isn't necessary to cut off the ray-cap. But one other thing would help. Is there any guard against the hypno-ray?"

Glan was getting more bewildered with each passing minute. "Of course." He looked at Mara. "Haven't you told him?"

"We were discussing other things," Mark said, thinking how similar this was to walking on eggs. "Besides, I'd rather get that sort of information from a man. It's probably too technical for a woman to understand." Mark wished fervently that Mara's ego didn't submerge completely when the scanner was turned on Mary. It was the big flaw in the complete conditioning theory. No information could be scanned from the conscious mind if it was information gleaned by another ego.

Glan was still frowning. "There's nothing very technical about it. In an area of this size, two high-frequency cross-beams will nullify the hypno-ray."

Mark rushed on, trying to keep the purple man off balance. "Another thing. A rumor must get to the *gorts* that we've solved the ray-cap and intend to attack from the air. Is there a solution to the ray?"

Glan shrugged, his troubled eyes still on Mary. "I don't know. They say there's a solution to everything."

"Here's what must be done," Mark said. "I think you'd better alert the Resistance and have them come here in ones and twos to get arms. Then you go to the *gort* headquarters and confess to being a Resistance man. But you've repented and are bringing them the information about the ray-cap and the coming attack. In order to clinch it, you can tell them where the dream pellets are—that is, after we've gotten the guns out of here."

MARY LOOKED at Mark, then swiftly hid the surprise in her face. What on earth were dream pellets? she wondered. It was Mark who sensed the true situation. This *zant*

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did not reflect the personality pattern found in the scannings. Therefore, he must have succumbed to temptation and was even now groggy from the dream-drug. That would account for his heavy-mindedness.

"They probably won't even scan you," Mary said. "If they do, can you throw up a barrier?"

"I—I don't know. I could try."

Mark could see that his purple man's acquiescence came from his love for Mara, his fear of displeasing her. He strove to rush the thing. "Then it's settled. Why don't you get going right away? Just leave everything else to us."

A few minutes later, they stood on the ramp. Glan had been dispatched to the Palmer House with instructions to present his revelations in exactly three revolutions of the Wrigley clock.

The other *zant* was sent out to call the Resistance in to pick up weapons.

Alone with Mark and his subordinate, Mary surveyed them thoughtfully. Then she said, "I'll handle the weapon dispersals. You two get some sleep. If you don't, you'll keel over from exhaustion."

"There are things to be done. We've got to arrange to get our hands on a friend of ours—the man who walks in and out of Chicago as though it was his own personal bathroom."

Mary glanced up quickly, but asked no questions. "Nothing can be done about that now. You've got to have some rest."

Mark yawned. "Maybe it's a good idea. We'll crawl into one of the other subs so we're out of the way. Call us if we're needed—and in two hours in any case."

Mark and his one-man squad found cots in the third submarine to the west. If they were worried about inability to rest, they had little time for it. They were asleep in a matter of seconds. The last thought in Mark's brain was:

I wonder if any of us will be alive three hours from now?

Not that it mattered much. He was too tired to care.

MARK AWOKE with a sense of lateness. He awakened his subordinate and climbed out of the submarine. Ice-water coursed through his veins as he glanced at the Wrigley clock and saw the hands standing at eleven o'clock. *Eleven o'clock.* Four hours had elapsed since they'd descended that ladder.

Mark swung his eyes in a circle. There was no living thing in sight. The city, from where he stood, was utterly deserted. No one—white, green, or purple, walked the streets. It looked like a ghost town.

Mark leaped from the conning tower and ran down the ramp to the pier. His sense of alarm increased, even as he came to the ramp of the other submarine, and he was not as cautious as he should have been. So he found himself standing there looking into the barrel of a queer-looking gun.

There was only one person in sight. Mary was gone. None of the space intruders could be seen. The man in sight was a native.

The man said, "Good day, Mr. Clayton. I've been waiting for you."

Mark said, "And greetings to you, Professor Halley. I surmised as much."

Professor Halley had changed a great deal. Gone was the half-feminine lightness of manner for which he had been famous. Gone was the soft, humorous light in his eyes; replaced now by a flintiness which bespoke the egomaniac.

"You don't seem surprised," Halley said.

"No. We've known about you—to

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some extent—for some time. And how is your friend Sargo? Planning to conquer any other worlds?"

Halley snarled, the snarl showing that he could carry light repartee just so far; that his deadly earnest fanaticism, when outside the bonds of necessary caution, had to come uppermost.

"You fools," he grated. "You utter fools! How long did you think your inane and childish policy of individual freedom could last? Don't you realize that therein you sowed the seeds of your own destruction?"

"Tell me more," Mark said. His eyes were on Halley's gun; his thoughts on the possibilities of overcoming him.

"Certainly. But first, tell your man to continue his descent. Otherwise I'll be forced to blow his legs to dust."

MARK GLANCED upward and the subordinate came sullenly down the ladder. He had been standing on a center rung awaiting developments.

"That's better."

"Yes—we've known for some time that we had a rotten spot in our apple barrel."

Halley's eyes glowed. "Then why did you let it remain?" he asked, too interested in that point to take issue with the insult.

"Because the damage you could do could be estimated. We had you pretty well contained and we knew where you were. That was the main point. Anything you've done in this project could have been done by someone else. If we'd picked you up, Sargo would have gotten another boy. And we wouldn't have known what boy."

Halley sneered. "You are making an excellent job of saving face. An amazingly nonchalant piece of second guessing. Tell me—what did you really know of Project Undermine?"

"That I suppose is Sargo's code-phrase for world-treachery?"

"I asked you a question."

"We knew very little for sure, but we surmised a great deal. That either you or Sargo contacted the space invaders and invited them to roost on a piece of our territory. That he plans to use their invasion as a means of making us lose world-wide face. That he hopes, in the near future, to throw a world alliance against us. The United States of America against the east, the west, the north, the south."

"You hit it exactly. Of course, it was no great feat of projection. You merely took our aims and conceded that we could accomplish all of them. Your nation is doomed, Clayton."

"Then you don't consider it your nation also?"

"Of course not—in the sense you refer to. It shall be my nation, of course, but as a squirming little community to hold under my thumb."

"Would you mind telling me what happened to the people I left here?"

"The people?" The narrowing of Halley's eyes, and the slight start, told Clayton what he wanted to know. By a stroke of great good fortune, the weapons had been distributed before Halley nosed out the hiding place. Otherwise, he would certainly have apprehended a few of the *zants*.

"What did you do with them?"

"If you refer to the green lady, she is in custody. As a matter of fact, you'll see her soon." Halley got to his feet. "Enough of this. We are going to take a little walk." He motioned toward the ladder. "You gentlemen first. And if you have any idea of running, get it out of your mind. You wouldn't travel fifty feet before I blasted you down."

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MARK AND Mary sat in a small, cement-walled room in the basement of the Palmer House. A steel door had been put in. They were alone.

"Why are they waiting?" Mary asked.

"I don't know. Maybe they get a sadistic pleasure out of leaving us here together for a little while. It's hard to figure them."

"We tried, didn't we?"

"That we did. Are you scared?"

"No. Not as long as you're here. Does that sound corny?"

"It sounds wonderful."

They sat in silence for a long minute. Then Mark said, "It isn't over, of course. We'll get them in the end. But I guess you and I won't be around to see it."

"It doesn't matter too much. Others will take our places."

"It was a good fight though. That's the main thing. It was a good fight."

Mark leaned over and kissed Mary. Without passion—gently. But there was much in the kiss that was unspoken and understood.

Mark settled back into his place against the wall beside Mary. He took her hand. "No," he said. "It isn't over yet."

As a matter of fact, it seemed just to have started. At that moment the door flew open. Glan stood there with several *zants*—all armed—all alert—all very grim.

"Come on," Glan fairly shouted. "Things have been happening! We did the impossible! We smashed the ray-cap machines—four of them. It cost us twenty fighters, but then the natives came in."

Glan and the *zants* were rushing Mark and Mary up to street level. "And more than that," he said. "A whole army of natives came in under the water—under the ray-cap. Between us, we took the city!"

Mark's lips went tight. "Halley—the little native who used to come in and out—the one who brought me here—where is he?"

Above—in the hallway—a gun flared at that precise moment. Two of the *zants* went down, their bodies half burned away. "Here I am, Clayton," Halley blazed. There was a gun in his hand, and madness in his eyes. "We haven't failed! You'll never beat us! We haven't failed!"

The last words came as an echo from charred and blackened lips in a face that was falling into dust. Halley was dead.

"Let's go," Mark shouted. "Let's get going! Give me one of those guns."

But there was nothing to do. It was over—finished. And everyone knew Sargo and his proposed alliance was over, also. Within twenty-four hours, he was dead at the hands of his own people, and the eastern tiger crawled, snarling, back into its lair.

NOW EVENTS moved swiftly. The *zants*, now in command of their own destiny, yearned for the void. In a few hours, with no announcement whatever, they began boarding their ferries to reach the great ship.

Mark and Mary stood by the water's edge, having come there quickly as the news of the exodus spread. Mark turned to speak to Mary just as the latter jerked her hand from his. "The girl in Washington—" Mark began with concern. "There hasn't been time to—"

Mary was staring at him in blank surprise....

MARA STARED at the strange, pale native who had been holding her hand. He seemed deeply surprised about something. "Mary!" the native said. "What's wrong?"

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Mara continued to stare. Horror suddenly dawned in the native's face. "The scanner!" he mouthed. "The scanner! It's gone off!"

Mara wondered what he was talking about. She drew away from him and saw Glan running toward her. She smiled, and when Glan got there she ran into his arms.

"Mary! Mary!" the native cried, and Mara drew away from him.

Glan was smiling. "We're going back into the void," he said. "We're going to find a world that isn't inhabited. Isn't it wonderful?"

"Wonderful," Mara returned, laying her head on his shoulder.

The native seemed to be going mad. He took her by the arm and tried to drag her away from Glan. She laughed, so high were her spirits, and jerked free. She ran to the ferry, calling Glan after her, and they stepped into the ferry.

The gate closed and the ferry shot across the water toward the *Narkus*.

The native on the shore had completely lost his mind now: He stood there screaming after her at the top of his voice.

Mara watched him for a few moments, puzzled. Then she turned to listen to what Glan was saying, to listen to Glan tell her about the future.

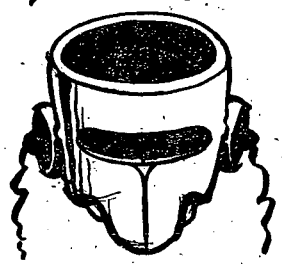
She forgot the native until they were far up in void. Then she glanced down through a port.

All she saw was a small green ball —far away....

THE END

THE ROBOT THAT HAD NO BRAIN

By Walt Crain



IN THE Wright Aeronautical Research Center they have developed the perfect simulacrum of a man! Constructed of plastic, metal, nylon, glass, rubber and a dozen other materials, this "robot" looks exactly like a man, but has only one of a human's faculties...he breaks!

Scientists designed this dummy (he is more than a robot) for the express purpose of studying the new technique of "human engineering". Men were never designed for operating the monstrous machines they do. Flesh is no match for metal; bones can't compare with steel; the brain case is a lot frailer than sheet metal. Yet men are always tangling with obstructions because their machines aren't perfect. The object of the aerial scientists' studies is to determine how to build safer machines, machines like jet planes, rockets—even automobiles—which won't destroy their creators when accidents happen.

To do this it isn't enough to provide a generous amount of rubber padding and hope for the best. Inertia effects which can snap off a person's head, bone-crushing shocks despite cushions and a hundred other possibilities require that scientists know exactly what happens to the human body when it meets the "irresistible force". The brainless robot, the dummy, the synthetic man, serves to demonstrate this, for he's been built with the same inherent strength and resistance to shock as his human counterpart. His collarbone breaks just as easily; his plastic skull deforms and breaks exactly like a human's; his legs fracture in the same way. In other words, an accident to the dummy perfectly duplicates an accident to a person. From an examination of the battered "corpse" after a planned accident, scientists can deduce perfectly how to build their equipment so that a human stands a chance of survival under similar circumstances.

This isn't important from only the aeronautical standpoint. Examine the roster of auto accidents for the country as a whole, and see the need for this sort of foolproof engineering. When helicopters and rockets become as common as cars the need will be even more crying. At long last science is deciding that machines must be built around humans, not the other way around. In the light of this attitude, a complete revision in the appearance and the means of control of machines of every kind is slowly taking place. Even the familiar push-button is going to be modified!

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THE UNENDING FLOW

By L. A. Burt

THE SECRET of producing goods and material for an insatiable world is really very simple. It is simply that the process must never cease—it must be a process of continuity, of endlessness, of flow, of transition without interruption. It is the outstanding characteristic of the modern machine age. It is the technique which has cast America in the role of the greatest producer in the world, and it is an attitude which the rest of the world is desperately striving for now.

Its origins are humble, going back in the world of manufacture to Henry Ford's basic idea of the assembly line, and extending unbroken through the decades to the modern miracles of production design which are present-day manufacturing plants. The fundamental idea in making anything in quantity is to keep that thing moving while it's being worked on, whether it's an automobile, a television set, an airplane, a quantity of ore, a chemical solution, a mountain of cardboard boxes or anything you care to name. American engineers have this concept more firmly rooted than any others.

Conveyor belts, assembly lines, pipelines, moving chains, rubber belts—even zipper tubes—are a basic feature of this method. The idea is never to do anything in fits or starts or in jerks, but to keep things moving and flowing smoothly from one stage to the next. The perfect model for this is any type of chemical plant where liquids and solids flow in and the finished product is pumped out. We ship oil preferably by pipeline instead of tank car because the flow never ceases.

Off-hand you might think this is a clear and obvious principle, but it has taken decades for its full value to be appreciated and the future will see it extended on a greater scale. In fact, the major difference between factories now and factories twenty years from now will be in the automatism of their flow processes, where interruptions will be fewer and goods will spew forth from the plants in even greater quantities. Look at the British radio factory which puts raw materials in one end of a block-long machine and takes radios out the other! Look at the principle of sub-assembly in our own factories. Literally there is no limit to the wealth we can create by exploiting this idea of continual flow!

OLD APE-MEN NEVER DIE!

By June Lurie

AS MOST devotees of science-fiction know, Burroughs was one of the earliest science-fiction writers with his "Tarzan" and "Martian" stories. They were short on science and long on fiction but they also were some of the most absorbing stories ever written, and those who have read them invariably look back on them nostalgically. By many of our present standards, the famous Burroughs stories are laden with flaws; they can be criticized on the grounds of poor writing, illogical science, etc. But they possessed such magic charm that most of the criticisms fall rather flat.

As an example of that, S. J. Perelman, who is one of the foremost humorously satirical writers of our time, in a recent issue of a national magazine devoted to satire, reviewed "Tarzan of the Apes" with his tongue in cheek. The article, like all of Perelman's works, was brilliant, but somehow or other it didn't quite come off. Try as he would, he failed to make the famous story of the lost jungle boy ridiculous. True, from a logical standpoint, the idea of a boy being raised by apes and undergoing the adventures he did in the jungle, is fantastic. It is not good science-fiction. But the world doesn't revolve necessarily around logic. You must have some of the wonder of the child when you read fantasy, and Burroughs' fantasies have all of the charm and realism of Grimm's fairy tales. In no way is *that* meant to be satirical. On the contrary, nothing but the strongest affection for Burroughs exists in this writer's mind. In spite of his admiration for Perelman, the writer can't go along with his opinion. Other friends feel the same way.

Burroughs created a world which has no counterpart in reality or in fiction. It is separate and unique, a rich rewarding experience for anyone who will take the trouble to savor it. This eulogy to Burroughs is simply the product of sincere admiration for a craftsman whose stories will be told and retold long after many presumably superior writers are dead and forgotten.

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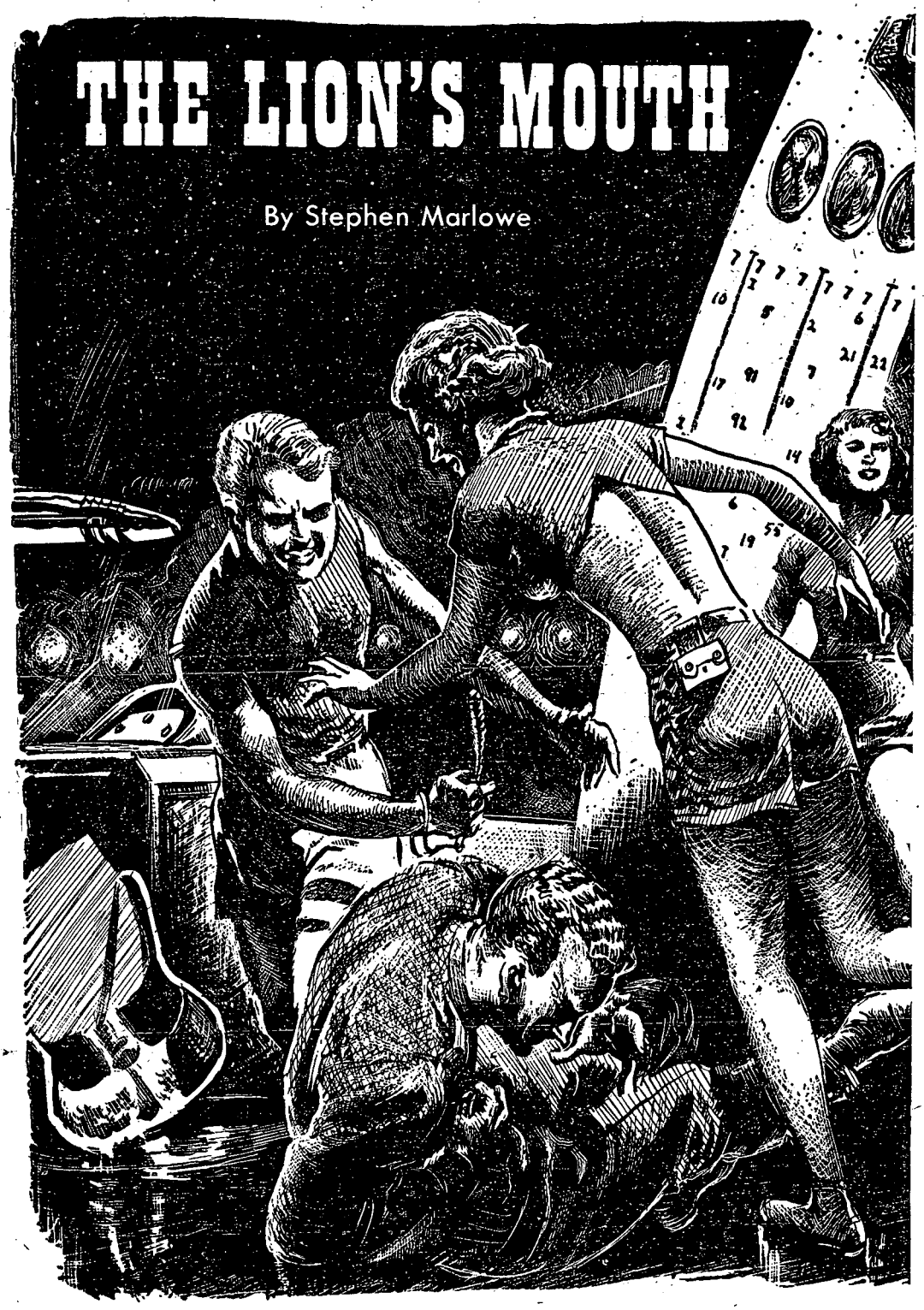
THE LION'S MOUTH

By Stephen Marlowe



What was so awful about it was that they were so young and so filled with murderous lust,

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When the invaders from space took over Earth, they instilled their vicious ideals in our children. But they overlooked one thing . . . .

IT WAS my brother's son Tommy who came around with the questions. My skinny, tousle-haired nephew, with his scrubbed, serious face—all of twelve years old. He'd have looked bright and eager playing Spacers and Pirates.

But the kids don't play those games any more. They're too busy being Monitors, with their shiny orange armbands and their meticulous little notebooks.

When the bell rang, Amy went to the door with her dishtowel, then came back and threw it across the rack. "Better put yours down, too," she told me. "Tommy is here."

I smiled. "So what? Don't tell me he won't wait until we're finished with the dishes, honey. Hell, call that kid down the hall and let them play.

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What's that kid's name again?"

Amy looked scared. "You don't understand. They made Tommy a Monitor last week. He's been all over the neighborhood with his book of questions."

"Made him a Monitor?" I guess I got excited pretty quick myself. "What did George say?" George is my brother, ten years older than I am. Amy and I—we're still the kids of the family: we've only been married six months.

Amy was angry. Not at me, not at Tommy, but at everything. "You tell me what he said. He didn't say a thing, and Tommy's a Monitor...."

I started to say something, I don't remember what, and then Tommy came into the room, plunking himself down on our one big overstuffed chair which, of course, is a family heirloom. With a grubby fist he opened the catch on his briefcase, explored around inside for a moment, and came up with his notebook.

" 'Lo, Uncle Harry," he said. "Aunt Amy."

"Hello, yourself," Amy said, biting her lip. "You still want to be a Captain of the Spacers?"

TOMMY smiled brightly. "Gosh, Aunt Amy, where have you been all these years? No one cares about that any more—that's kid stuff. I'll be a Monitor till I'm sixteen, then I'll join the Police Corps. There's an awful lot of crime around—"

Amy changed the subject quickly. "How's your father?"

That made Tommy pout. "Oh, I dunno. Okay, I guess. But he has some awful silly ideas. He took my questions as a big joke, that's what. You shoulda heard some of his answers, miles off the beam. Wait till the Police Corps gets hold of them."

My grin must have looked stupid, because I sure didn't feel like grinning. "Don't tell me you'll show them?"

"What? Of course I'll show them. That's why I'm a Monitor. That's why I'm here, too. I'd like for you to answer some questions."

"Go ahead," I told him. "Shoot." My mouth was dry.

"Names?"

"You know them," Amy said.

"Aw, come on! Answer: 'No partiality to relatives or friends', they tell us. Just questions and answers."

I told him our names, our ages, occupations, and so forth. He jotted everything down with one of those new, really lifetime pens, looking up every now and then to ask his next question from the question sheet.

"Do you buy from the black market?"

Amy snorted. "I don't like—"

"Certainly," I said hastily. "That is, when we have the money."

"Do you buy from the gray market?"

"When we have—" Amy began, but I almost shouted: "No!"

The distinction was a valid one. *They* ran the black market for their own profit, and some of our own people ran the gray market, dealing in an illegal traffic of necessities. To get by, you had to use both—provided you had the money.

"Do you own a Bible?"

As a matter of fact, Amy had both the Old Testament and the New, and sometimes, when we were high and feeling particularly iconoclastic, she'd take them out of their hiding place and read to me. But that was rare, and mostly I was trying to get Amy to destroy the books, despite the fact that I liked them.

"No," I told Tommy.

"Any affiliated literature?"

"No."

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"Well, do you believe in a Mes... uh... Messiah?"

"I don't know," Amy said brazenly. And scowling, Tommy started to write that down.

"Wait a minute, kid," I smiled. "Naturally we believe in a Messiah."

HE SCRATCHED behind his ear with the pen. "Hold on. You do or you don't. One answer for each husband and wife team. Which is it, Uncle Harry?"

Amy glared at me, but I said: "We believe."

"Who is the Messiah?"

"The Leader of the Karadi, whose star and planet we do not know," I recited, sing-song fashion.

"Harry!" Amy cried.

"And who are His disciples, who can show us the path to beauty and truth and wisdom?" The words almost sounded silly, coming from Tommy's mouth.

"The Karadi here on Earth," I told him quietly. "We must obey them because they are disciples of their Leader, the Messiah. We don't read the forbidden literature because it was written before this glorious wisdom was given to us. The only religion is the new religion, and its Prophet is the Karadi sub-Leader, here on Earth."

Tommy smiled. "You're doing fine, Uncle Harry. You almost sound like you went to a Karadi School yourself." I had missed it, in fact, by half a dozen years. I had been a kid when the vanguard of the Karadi hordes came into the Solar System, soon after our first rocket had reached the asteroid belt.

"Now," Tommy continued, "do you remember the old days, before the Karadi hosts came down?"

"Naturally we remember," Amy admitted. "We were young, but how could we forget?"

"Do you ever look back on those days?"

"You can't just blot them out of your mind," Amy told him, angrily, almost as if she were talking to one of the Karadi and not to our nephew.

"Well, which do you like better?" It was phrased just the way a kid would talk, that question, but it packed dynamite. There were shades of meaning in your answer, subtle differences which the Karadi sought with their probing, logical minds. And who was to say that the Karadi logic was at all like our own? I have known men who answered that question, and thought they answered it well—but who were assigned, for their answer, to the labor camp which is taking down the Temple at Karnak stone by ponderous stone and shipping it home to the Karadi planet, wherever it is, as a trophy.

"Today is better," I said. "Infinitely better." Tommy wanted to know how to spell infinitely.

After that, Amy gave him a piece of hard bread and some honey which she had purchased on the gray market, but her hands trembled as she served it. Tommy wolfed it down and skipped across the room to the door, making one final notation in his book before he dropped it back into the briefcase. "Gota run!" he called back over his shoulder. "S'long!"

"YOUR NEPHEW," Amy told me. "Tommy."

Yes, Tommy. In that, at least, the Karadi followed a pattern not new to our planet. Both the Nazis and the Communists used it in recent times, and you could probably find it all the way back through the dusty corridors of our dead history, if you took the trouble to look for it. In conquest, you don't pay too much attention to the old generation: let it hate you. But concentrate on the new, this is

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the flesh and the fiber of control. Indoctrinate the children, and you own the land. *Their* children will regard the grandparents as foolish, cantakerous old men and women, harmless, cranky folk, longing for what was not because it cradled the withered flower of their own youth.

I picked a cigarette stub out of a big tin box, straightened it and lit it. Amy was crying softly. She had liked Tommy once, I think, as much as she hated the Karadi school.

"Promise me one thing," she said.

"What's that?"

"That we won't have children. Ever. I couldn't bear to see them that way, Harry, honest. Torn away from us, slowly, painlessly, not knowing it at all. Promise me, Harry?"

I said, "Do you think he can get George into trouble?"

"Of course he can. And he will, still being bright-eyed about the whole thing. That's the worst part of it. Damn them, Harry! Damn them...."

I guess we all curse the Karadi quietly. But not in the presence of children, because they are the virgin soil for the New Earthmen, who won't curse the Karadi at all.

We went to bed early, and Amy was stiff and still frightened when I took her into my arms.

In the morning I met my brother George at his desk in the Spaceport office. It's funny in a way, just when man was reaching up for the stars, the Karadi came down from them. And now it looked like we'd be planetbound grubs forever, plying our tiny corner of the star-trade for the Karadi overlords. We worked in the Spaceport office, George and I, statisticians, and through the big dome we could watch the Karadi ships go thundering out into the void. We earned a thousand dollars a week, each of us, but it took fifty to buy a loaf of black bread and a hundred for a half-gallon jug of adulterated milk—if you could get it.

"That crazy kid with his questions," George said.

"I know. He was around to our place, too."

"I'll bet they can't make head or tail out of my answers," George laughed. In a lot of ways, he was worse off than I. He was older, had lived more in the old days, and hence would forget less. At times it was a little hazy to me, like a dream—a pleasant one, if I let myself dwell on it. But George almost took the Karadi as a joke, mostly because they hardly bothered to govern personally. Our mayor is a girl, eighteen years old, a Karadi-ite through and through, and her cousin, a year her junior, is chief of police.

THEY CAME for George just before noon, the trim, arrogant girls in their green outfits, the strapping youths in orange.

"George Chambers?" This was one of the girls.

"Yeah. Yeah, I'm Chambers."

One of the boys said: "You'll come with us, please."

"What the hell for?"

"Faulty questionaire, Chambers. All fouled up. Come on."

The kid began to paw him, and George pulled his hand away. "Hey, cut that out! If you kids—"

I got up and crossed the room to them. "Better go, George. You'd better go."

"Don't be stupid, Harry. Just because I have fun answering a couple of questions for my son—my own son. They ain't serious. It's some game they get taught at school."

One of the boys said drily: "I been out of school three years, Chambers.

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If you think this is a game, better play it our way."

George began to laugh, and that got them sore. They were the New Earthmen, and they very definitely did not want to be treated like kids. One of the boys stepped forward and used his hand like a whip, slapping it smartly, back and forth, across George's face. He bellowed once and grabbed the hand. He must have squeezed it, because the boy began to yelp.

I stood there, clenching my fists, feeling the nails bite into my palms. I couldn't do a thing. There was no sense being theatrical about it, just as there had been no sense telling the truth in answer to Tommy's questions. If they wanted George they'd take him, whether I tried to stop them or not.

The second boy clipped George behind the ear with one of those little metal-filled leather clubs they carry, and George staggered. I felt sweat trickling down the bridge of my nose. "George..." I said, but I just stood there.

The club caught him behind the ear again, expertly, and as he started to fall, the first boy—the oldest, perhaps he was nineteen—kicked him. He lay on his stomach, panting, and one of the girls prodded his side with her foot, but he didn't try to get up.

I TURNED away, feeling a little sick. Evidently the other girl had been watching me. She was smiling now, tapping her own club against the palm of her hand. "For a minute I thought you'd do something foolish. Your friend here is lucky one of us isn't a year older, he could carry a gun. My brother killed three men already, he says."

A generation of sadists, that's what the Karadi were producing. This green-garbed girl was pretty, if you could somehow divorce the hardness from her eyes. She should have been getting ready for her first formal dance, trying to decide if she should let her best date do a little more than kiss her. But she waited impatiently for the time, soon, when they would let her carry a gun, and I think, had that time been now, she would have used it on George quite cheerfully.

I watched dumbly as they pulled George to his feet. Then, one girl supporting him on either side, one boy in front and one behind, wary, they escorted him from the office. Our secretary, a maiden woman in her thirties, went back to her typewriter with a lot of loud and unnecessary noise.

All the rest of that day I felt weak. I couldn't do much work. I'd try, because work would be a good opiate, but I'd see Tommy sitting in the big over-stuffed chair, asking his inane, childish questions, which were not childish at all as far as the Karadi were concerned. They weren't much interested in our answers, when you got right down to it. The questions weren't even very good ones. The children's reactions were what mattered. Oh, they're shrewd, these Karadi.

Or I'd see George there on the floor, big, clumsy George, hardly understanding it all, thinking until today that the boys in their orange shorts and blouses and the girls in their green shorts and halters were quite a joke. The boys who had been taught to break a man's bones efficiently, when they had to, and the girls who had been taught to watch and to help.

I EXCUSED myself early, and Miss Peterson sniffed her good afternoon to me. I didn't want to take the bus today. Somehow, the packed

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crowd of people, the noise, the talk of commonplace things—all this would irritate. I walked home the long way, out across the Spaceport itself, over the catwalks that skirt the blasting pits, through the east gate and along the silent highway which once had been a great commercial artery. Here and there the concrete was crumbling to slow ruin, and scattered clumps of weeds had poked their way up through the larger cracks.

What would Amy have done in my place? What would she say when I told her how George had been taken, fighting for the freedom he never really thought he had lost until today? And what would my sister-in-law Alice do now, provided they didn't take her, too?

I passed the Karadi school, the sprawling new structure of metal and glass, shining and polished, the only new building in a dying city that had memories for tombstones. A couple of kids were fighting, rolling over and over on the dusty ground, and a crowd of them had gathered to watch. They were eager, like kids always had been at a fight, but they were more eager still when it was over, when the fat boy of ten lay on his back, bawling, and they all closed in to call him names.

In our apartment, Amy had left a note for me, hurriedly scrawled on a scrap of paper atop the kitchen table. *Harry: I've gone to Alice's. Don't worry. Amy.*

Mechanically, I straightened out one of the cigarette stubs; we wouldn't be getting our new pack till next week. When the stubs got real short we'd remove the tobacco from the paper and start all over again with sheets torn from the free Karadi magazines. It was a good grade of paper, but it burned too fast.

Amy was like George, in a way. She knew we were a conquered people, and until today I don't think he had known it at all, because hard times had been on hand just before our own space travel came with promises of getting rid of them in short order. So the hard times had grown worse, and now the Karadi were here too.

But Amy was like George anyway. He'd talk against the Karadi because he hardly believed in their efficacy. She'd talk against them out of hatred, plain and simple. If she had gone to comfort Alice, and if the teen-aged, Karadi-inspired police were there, or even Tommy and his gang of armband-wearing Monitors...

I HAD NO idea other than to get Amy away from there as fast as I could, so when I met one of the green-clothed girls outside our apartment building, I was in no mood to stop.

"You're Harry Chambers, aren't you?"

"That's right," I said, walking faster. Amy and I had done nothing, and this could only be some routine questioning, relating to George, perhaps.

"One of the Monitors registered a complaint about you this morning, Chambers."

"Who?" A pointless question, because there could be only one answer.

"Monitor T. Chambers," she told me. "Oh, a relation? Good for Tommy, he'll do all right."

I kept on walking, but the girl fell into stride with me. "Can it wait?" I asked her. "There's something important I'd like to do, and I'll report any place you say, afterwards."

"Listen, Chambers. When we want you, we want you. We're not playing games." Through it all, I guess they were still conscious of the fact that they were kids, whether they were

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Karadi-sanctioned or not.

The girl reached behind her, took her club, just half a foot long, off her belt. "Come on now, Chambers."

You could obey the Karadi rule because you hardly ever saw the rulers. The kids let you alone provided you did what you were supposed to do. But right then, at that moment, Amy might be talking too much. I thought of her being tagged, classified, shipped off to a labor camp. I did not want to stick my neck out—it was a silent trap, almost an invisible one, but the jaws were ready to close on you any time. Still....

I started to run and, at once, I felt foolish. Running away from a teenage girl, me. People stopped to look, and once someone reached out halfheartedly to stop me. I sidestepped and kept on running, and when I turned around to look, I saw the girl was gaining, fairly flying on her long slim legs, brandishing her club and yelling for me to stop.

When she got within five feet of me, she leaped. For a moment I felt hands clutching at my waist, then slipping down my legs. I lunged, twisted—and the hands were gone. Still running, I looked back. The girl lay sprawled on the broken sidewalk cursing and shaking her fist at me. Karadi tool, who would have killed me on the spot, had she been a year older and carried a gun instead of her club.

I ducked around a corner and into a doorway, watching the girl fly past a moment later, her uniform all dirty and a little torn from her fall. Then the door opened behind me.

"Hey! What are you doing here like this?" I guess I presented quite a sight, cowering in that doorway.

It was one of the orange-garbed boys, and his voice had been loud. The girl must have heard him, because she turned and ran toward us, yelling shrilly. I felt more like a cornered animal, which I had seen enough times in the Karadi-inspired films on hunting that were supposed to instill a lust for blood in the younger generation. I sobbed once and then I lashed out with my right fist, hardly thinking any longer of the consequences, catching the startled boy on the point of his jaw.

His head crashed against the doorframe and he slid to the ground. The girl, unable to check herself, tripped and sprawled over his outstretched legs. She looked very feminine, then, and very young, because she started to cry. I pushed clear of the few onlookers, rounded the corner again, ran down an alley, climbed a fence, and came out on the other side of the block. I was trembling all over.

AMY SAT on an old battered couch, holding Alice's hands. Tommy stood there insolently. "He shunta done it. He shunta. I told him his answers were all wrong, so what does he do? He laughs. Laughs! My own father..."

"Be quiet, Tommy," Amy said. "Your mother isn't feeling well."

"George," Alice mumbled. And again, over and over, "George, George, George...."

Amy stood up. "Hello, Harry. I guess you know what happened. I guess—"

"Say, have the Police been here yet?" Tommy wanted to know.

"What do you mean?" Amy looked like she knew, but she asked him anyway.

"Well, Mom was in on it, too. They'll have to question her. Look, Mom, if you say it was all Pop's idea, they'll prob'ly let you go. Maybe I can stick up for you, if you won't tell."

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Amy slapped his face then, hard. "Little monster! Why don't you go away some place and play with your toy club? They'll be giving you a real one soon."

Tommy just didn't understand. "Shucks, Aunt Amy, I'm only doing what I gotta. An' my teacher, boy, was he happy! Say, thanks for that honey last night, it was swell. Have the Police been to your place yet?"

Amy was bewildered. "Whatever for?"

"Gee, you oughta know you can't get honey any place except on the gray market. You can tell them it was given to you, on'y don't let it happen again. I won't tell."

"Thanks," I said.

"If the Police want us," Amy said, "I guess you'll insist we go back, Harry. Well—"

"One of the greenies was at our place already," I told her.

"Oh?"

"Yeah. Her uniform is all dirty and torn, because she fell twice. And one of her boyfriends has a nasty jawache, I'll bet." I told her what happened.

Amy was smiling a little. "Well, I'm glad. It had to come sooner or later, Harry. But what will we do?"

"Gee," Tommy whistled. "They c'n kill you for that. Wait right here. Don't go away. I gotta get the police."

HOW VICIOUSLY naif could he be? Well, I didn't wait to find out. I'm only twenty-five, but I must have felt like the grandfather of all graybeards then, because there was an unthinkable abyss between Tommy and me. I pulled him down on the sofa and I spanked him. I spanked him until he was bawling lustily, and Alice even tried to stop me, hollering and pulling at my hand. I'll never understand women.

I told Amy to find some good strong rope, but we had to settle for strips of curtain, twisted. I tied Tommy down on one of the chairs, almost feeling foolish while his little twelve-year-old muscles squirmed and struggled. I rammed one of his own socks into his mouth for a gag, tying a piece of curtain around that, too.

Then I stood clear. "What'll we do? We'll try to get the hell out of this city. You hear stories about people who live in the hills, who haven't accepted the Karadi rule. Just rumors, because no one ever saw them. The Karadi, of course, are content to stay within the cities, supervising our trade for export. Well, we'd see if we could turn those rumors into fact. "But first," I said, "we'll try to get George."

"I don't want to go," Alice said. "There's Tommy. They'll poison his mind without me. They'll—"

We had no time, and I couldn't be anything but harsh. "What do you think they've done up to now? Don't you see, Alice, they don't care if we hate them. They can still train the children. You couldn't fix Tommy here even if they let you start all over again from scratch. Which they wouldn't do. You stay, and they'll take you, like they took George. This way, well—"

She didn't say anything, but she got up and followed us out the door, slowly. She was trying not to cry. And she didn't look back at Tommy.

IT WAS cold that night, and raining. Not a storm, but a slow, steady downpour from sullen skies. The streets were nearly empty. Amy wanted to return home first and get our Bible, but it was likely that our apartment would be watched, and I didn't let her.

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The worst part of all abortive revolutions, a teacher once told me, long ago, before the Karadi came, was the fact that they were chaotic. No plan—just a brief explosion of fire and fury before they subsided into less than embers. And that was us, I guess. We wanted to get George and flee the city. But how?

It's hard, when you don't even know what you're fighting against. I had seen one of the Karadi, years ago, and Amy had never seen one of our masters at all. Just the kids, the greenies and the oranges, and the Monitors like Tommy. You couldn't fight your own children, and maybe that's why the Karadi, who saw them every day and warped their minds until hate was where love should have been, maybe that's why the Karadi had it so easy. I don't know, it's a thought. And suddenly, my years of indifference, of dull compliance, seemed like so much scraping and bowing. I wanted no part of it.

Our small-scale revolution took a direct course of action, because we didn't know of any other. I have heard tales of the old days—before the Communists were swept first and most thoroughly under the wave of Karadi conquest—how people fought totalitarian masters with esoteric underground organizations. That's what we should have had now, meetings in cellars, storehouses of guns and ammunition here in the city.

But we didn't. You try it: "Yes, I was spying on my son last night, and here's what I learned." Or, "Ah-hah, that's what I said. My neighbor's daughter, you know, the cute little trick with the blonde curls? She's going to a rally tonight. Sure, we can smash it and spill the kids' blood all over the place. What? The Karadi—well, one or two of them might possibly be there."

Amy had run over to Alice's place without any over-clothing, and now my coat was draped across her shoulders. My suit was a sodden mess, and I was drenched all the way through when we reached the police station. I didn't feel so good, because somehow I felt it was a futile gesture. We couldn't just *take* George from them; there'd be some of the older police here, the New Earthmen, half a dozen years younger than I, who carried guns and knew how to use them.

A quick, futile stab for freedom. A volley of shots in the rain, or maybe the clubs if we were lucky, and then a dozen years at one of the labor camps. I have seen men return from those camps, broken and doddering, good only to crawl quietly into corners for a few years, and then to die. Amy—like that...

WE WENT up the steps slowly, saw the timeless globular lights outside, but heard the voices of children within. The New Earthmen, proud of their orange and green, proud of their niche in the Karadi secret sun, taught to play at cops and robbers for real, and taught to love it.

Alice smiled. She had been pretty once. I remember I had been a kid when George took her home and introduced his bride to the family. But years of watching them take Tommy's mind and twist it, watching them draw him away from her until he had become the monster that Amy had called him, had etched lines on her face, had made her eyes tired and old. Now she said, "I hope you understand, Harry. I hope you can make him understand, Amy." She took our hands briefly, then placed Amy's in mine. She blew a kiss to us, and ran within the police station.

I started after her, muttering an oath, but Amy held me back. "Wait,

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please, please wait," she said.

We stood there in the rain, listening. "Good evening," Alice said. "I'm Alice Chambers. You have my husband, George. I believe you want me?"

And one of the oranges, arrogant-voiced: "Hell, yes! We were about to send out for you. Say, are you related to a Harry Chambers, and his wife—Amy?"

"Yes, we're in-laws. They're home now, at my place...."

"Hey, Max! Take Al and Flora and get those two, willya?"

"My son's there, too. He's a good boy, really. My Tommy—"

"Damn right he's a good boy, lady. Well, one of you gals take her inside to detention, huh? There ya go. And thanks, lady."

Max, Al, and Flora came toward the open doorway, three of the New Earthmen with their guns. I guess we rated them, after what I had done in the afternoon.

Amy pulled me back down the stairs. "Hey," I said, "cut it out! Alice is trying to give herself up and send them off in the wrong direction so we can get away—"

"Shut up," my wife told me. She tugged at my hand, pulled me down, crouching, behind some shrubbery. Max, Al, and Flora came right past us. Flora was the girl who had fallen twice this afternoon. She didn't have a gun, but the other two did.

"Say," she said, "will you two guys do me a favor? When we get them, will you hold that Harry Chambers and let me hit him? Will you hold him so I can hit him and kick him till he screams?"

They walked away into the rain, the transparent slickers over their bright orange and green. "Nice little thing," Amy said as I started back toward the steps. "Hold it, Harry. Please. Look—" She walked beside me, up the steps. "It was stupid, Harry. We couldn't pull it off. What would happen? They'd take us, too. What for, Harry? What for? Someone's got to get away. Harry, Harry—please. Alice wants it this way, or she wouldn't have given herself up. And I want it this way, Harry."

I turned around slowly and looked at her, the lights gleaming on the rain in her hair. *Promise me one thing. That we won't have children. Ever. I couldn't bear to see them that way, Harry, honest. Torn away from us, slowly, painlessly, not knowing it at all. Promise me, Harry?*

Well, I hadn't promised her. I'd never promise that. And out in the hills, far away from the city, in the range of weathered old mountains to the south and east, who knows? But my brother and his wife, George and Alice... Yet it was as hopeless as Amy had told me—Amy, who could live with me out in the far hills, where everything is not ugly....

IT WAS NOT difficult getting out of the city. You need travel permits, but the kids at the south gate were busy playing games, and we slipped under the wire fence. I didn't mind the mud against my face at all. It almost felt clean.

The first range of tired old hills is behind us now, and in another month or two the brown earth of the highlands will nurture a spreading carpet of green. It has been two weeks, and the city is fading like a hazy, half-remembered nightmare.

Yesterday we thought we saw trails that did not look like animal trails, and we set out upon one of them. Earlier today we passed an old man, but he just looked at us curiously.

All at once, the people came out of the woods, gathering around us,

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talking excitedly, smiling, laughing. It was a little too much for Amy: she started to cry. But I think the cry will do her good.

They took us into their village, a big sprawling place in the woods. You'd never spot it from the air, not even if you were looking for it, because it's all spread out.

In this, at least, I think the Karadi have made a mistake. They can train the children, yes—but they can't ignore the original generation completely. The village is large. I don't know, perhaps it has five thousand people.

An old man took me into a storehouse under the side of a hill. They have guns, plenty of them. "But we won't use 'em," he told me. "Unless they attack us. That's not what we're here for."

I found out just why they were here later. I came out into the sunlight, where the old man's wife had taken Amy in tow. Now, a group of children had clustered about them, squealing and yelling and playing like children should. No greenies, no oranges, no Monitors. Just kids.

Amy was crying and laughing, both at the same time. She got down on her knees and was playing with the children, looking at them, touching them.

The old woman smiled. "These are the real New Earthmen, for tomorrow." Then, she jabbed a finger against Amy's chest. "And you, my dear—I hope you are a breeder. That's what we want, dozens of kids." She laughed. "If you're not good for that, better scurry off into the uplands and become a hermit."

Amy stood up and brushed a stray lock of hair back from her forehead. She came to me and took my hands in hers, then she said, "Harry, you can forget all about that promise I wanted you to make." Shamelessly, she turned to the old couple and told them: "We'll be two of the best damned breeders you ever saw."

And we will, too.

THE END

THE ELECTROBILE

By Salem Lane

THAT THE helicopter will be the major method of transportation of the future goes almost without saying. It's only a matter of time. The truck and automobile of course won't be completely displaced and until the helicopter comes into wide use they'll be steadily improved. It's possible already to see the gradual changes destined for the automobile and they depend mainly on the ubiquitous electric motor. Governed by this new development, the automobile is going to have a considerably changed power plant in the near future, though its external appearance and lines may still take any form that strikes the designer's eye.

The trend of motor vehicle powering can be seen in two recent developments. Several huge Earth-moving machines are powered by electric motors individually attached to each wheel and fed juice from a generator driven by a diesel or gasoline engine. The flexibility, economy and accuracy of control, plus the elimination of all sorts of complicated mechanical gadgets like clutches, drive shafts, etc., make this gas-electric form of drive very intriguing. Several foreign automobiles have been built with this form of drive.

So far it's only a straw in the wind, but ideas like this have a way of catching on fast, and it's almost a certainty that very soon large numbers of "electrobiles" and "electrotrucks" will make their appearance.

In itself an announcement of this sort doesn't appear to be earth-shaking or revolutionary because it creeps up on us so gradually. Actually it is all of those things and it's a perfect example of how we can see the future unfolding before our eyes. The future comes to us by small increments, not be overwhelming jumps—and we certainly adjust to it better that way too!

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THE MAN NOBODY KNEW

By Don Wilcox

Ronnie worshipped Ballinger, and would have gone through hell for him. And it looked now as if he had been forced to do just that!

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WHEN THE gunshots became audible, Ronnie Conwell was slogging along in a river of loose, slimy purple mud. It had grown steadily deeper, but he was still wading, with the gentle flow of mud up to his armpits. He held his pistol up in the air. He was keeping a sharp lookout for attacks by the big monster water slitters that were known to infest Venus swamps.

He had lost his way in his search for a certain Venus city. Clayton, his partner, had turned back—and met a tragic end. But Ronnie Conwell had plodded on, naked, through the sea of warm mud because he had faith. Faith in his boss back on Earth. Ballinger the Magnificent.

If Ballinger had said, "Send Ronnie

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Conwell up in a rocket ship, tell him to cruise into the sun's corona and bring me some photographs from the *inside;*" Ronnie would probably have done his best to accommodate. You don't mind walking into the world's most dangerous jobs if you believe in the man you work for. Ronnie believed in Ballinger and would have gone to hell for him. And now it seemed he had done just that.

Clayton got his share of the hellish ordeal all in one dose. He went blundering back toward the east bank where they had left their clothes. Ronnie had tried to talk him out of it. Now that it was daylight the Venus Oojaggs would be gunning for them.

"Those savage boys will perforate you, you know that," Ronnie had warned.

"I'll steal a mud boat," Clayton boasted, "right under their noses."

"You'll never get away with it in the light. They're the fiercest Earthman haters in all Venus. What do you want, suicide?"

"I'll take my chances and I'll see you later."

"Where?"

"Back in the U.S.A. in some nice quiet cocktail lounge."

Clayton said it with a harshness that made Ronnie know his partner was all fed up.

"You don't mean you're quitting!"

"How'd you guess it?"

"You can't do that, Clayton. We've got to find that city!"

"Listen, Ronnie. Where in our contract does it say we're supposed to turn into mud turtles and flap through this slime?"

"We have a job to do. We're being paid well. And Ballinger will remember."

"Ballinger!" Clayton spat the word. "They call him 'the Magnificent'! He wouldn't be so damned magnificent if he had to wade through this mud puddle. Why didn't he mark it on our maps?"

"I don't know."

"Why didn't he call us in and talk with us before he started us off on this wild goose chase?"

"I don't know."

"Well, I know," Clayton said. "It's because he's too high-hat to talk with the men that work for him. We're just so much dirt to him. Can you see *him* sloggin' through this mud the way he expects us to do? Hell, no, he's back on Earth nice and safe, up in his skyscraper penthouse, sipping cocktails with the ladies. All right, I'm through. You can stick if you want to. I'm going back."

"I'll carry on," Ronnie said coldly. "All I can say is, I pity you for quitting."

"The pity is mutual," Clayton said. "Goodbye, sap!"

RONNIE had watched him plod back across toward the morning sun. Through the occasional bunches of shrubbery that poked up through the current of mud, Ronnie kept sight of him all the way back, and soon could see him clambering up the east bank to the knoll where they had hidden their clothing.

Ronnie's breathing almost stopped then, from the sight his eyes witnessed. Clayton was not the only figure silhouetted against the pink ball of the rising sun. A knot of Oojaggs swarmed up from the other side of the knoll. Clayton was running. The Oojaggs headed him off. The chase came back over the top of the knoll.

A dozen of them pounded him down with clubs. Through the morning stillness Ronnie could hear the faint echoes of Clayton's last cries.

So that was the Oojaggs' first murder of the morning. A swift one, un-

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ceremonious, and final.

Ronnie was deeply angry with himself. Why had he let the poor guy turn back? If he had tried harder—if he had talked more stubbornly—if he had threatened—

"My fault! My fault!"

For minutes that was all Ronnie could say to himself. Then, clinging to a bit of island that protruded above the flow of the mud stream, he turned over in his mind the foggy mixture of causes that lay back of this tragedy, and he found himself saying, "If Ballinger could just have called us in and talked with us, and told us about these dangers. If!"

There! He was doing it, too. He was hurling the blame back at Ballinger, the same as Clayton had done a few minutes before. The poison of Clayton's remarks had taken root that fast. And because Clayton had met death, one's natural sympathies tended to upset the logic of one's thinking. No, Ronnie wouldn't let his thoughts go off on such spiteful tangents.

"Who do I think I am to think such thoughts about Ballinger, the Magnificent, when I've never even met the guy?" Ronnie's jaws tightened. "I'm one little cog in a big wheel. I've got my orders. My job is to find a city, and see what the hell's gone wrong with the doctor that Ballinger planted in that city. The doctor may be dead, or he may have deserted, the same as Clayton. My job is to find out. The map said the city was this way. My job is to keep going."

That was Ronnie's speech to himself. His nerves stiffened and he cancelled Clayton out of his mind and went on his way.

That was when the gunfire sounded from across the muddy way. Ronnie ducked for cover. They were after him.

THROUGH a sprig of vegetation he looked back and saw five or six Oojaggs rowing into the muddy stream in a flat-bottom boat. They must have spotted him. They had found the hidden clothing on the bank, no doubt. This and the tracks down to the stream had assured them that another Earth victim was somewhere around and they meant to find him.

He moved swiftly through the stream toward a little ten-foot island of sorts. It was only a nob of bushes that had withstood the flow of the stream, but it would offer momentary concealment. If he could make it.

A spray of vegetation was sliced away by a bullet, and the gunfire roared across the stream. They had spotted him all right. He tried to hurry. His footing was strangely smooth, as if he were walking over a floor of stone—a gently arched floor under five-and-a-half feet of mud. The warm flowing substance surged against his naked body, skimmed over his shoulders and kissed his chin. He held his pistol just above the surface.

Then he saw something that froze his blood.

Something moved into view along the surface of the stream, directly between him and the approaching boat. It was a Venus water slitter!

The six Oojaggs had already seen it, that was why they had stopped firing. It was swimming upstream, a splendid specimen of a swamp monster, at least fifty feet long.

The Oojaggs crouched down in their boat and allowed it to drift slowly with the stream. They had no wish to tangle with the monster. Fifty yards separated them, and some-

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thing less than that distance lay between Ronnie and the huge serpent-like creature.

Its head, held with a proud arched neck several feet above the level of the mud flow, was bright yellow with blue and green markings. It wore an armor of arrowhead-shaped spines down the length of its back. Nature had equipped it for fighting. Ronnie had seen water slitters before only in pictures. He knew of their prowess in Venus swamps. They moved like water snakes; they could fight with the ferocity of a tiger.

Ronnie clung to the edge of the little clump of vegetation, his feet kicking about for a more secure anchor. He had been seen by the men, and he strongly suspected he had also been spotted by the beast. The glistening of its opalescent eye betrayed a nervousness of manner.

It looked toward the boat. It gave a quick darting movement in that direction. Then it flashed its eyes toward the clump of vegetation where Ronnie waited, and came gliding across the surface toward him.

The pink of its nostrils and mouth showed bright. Sunlight flashed from the deadly ivory knives that were its fangs. Ronnie hadn't meant to move a muscle, but the stalks of grass beside his upraised pistol trembled from the current. The creature came on, now only a few yards away. Twitches of nervousness ran the length of its green and golden spine. The kick-like action brought it into a half-coiled position. Its head lifted higher, and the drift of the current helped to swing its tensed long body toward Ronnie's hiding place. It drew into position for the strike. The smell of its breath was in the air. Its hideous pink lips stretched back angrily and it sprang.

RONNIE'S ray pistol aimed for the lower jaw. The lavender blaze cut a sure hard line through jaw and brain. The jaw dropped and a beastly groan welled up from the deep throat. The wounded head slipped forward—but, wounded or dead, the monster struck for Ronnie with all the force of its steel-tight body.

Ronnie dived.

He plunged down into the creamy mud, kicking hard, grabbing for anything that would help him to stay down under as long as the thrashing of mud went on above him. Wounded or dead, the water slitter was pounding the surface of the stream with the fury of a hurricane.

Ronnie fought to stay under. His lungs were growing tight. His hands scratched at the bed of the stream for anything that would help him stay down. He caught onto a projecting rock, it pulled loose, he snatched at other rocks. Everything was breaking out of his grasp, and suddenly—

He was going down!

The swirl of mud into a suckhole was drawing him down!

Lungs bursting for breath, he was unable to fight back to the surface. Forces were sweeping him the other way. Something had broken through under the river of mud, and the swirling vortex was drawing him down and down....

CHAPTER II

THE MAGNIFICENT Ballinger moved with an air of leisure through the solarium of his skyscraper penthouse, looking out at the lights of the great city that stretched away to the mountains and the stars.

The last of his evening's guests had departed. Only his trusted secretary, Montgomery, remained.

"Mr. Ballinger," Montgomery said

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in his always gracious manner, "if you're serious about getting away for a short vacation, perhaps we should make some plans yet tonight. Assuming that you would wish to return in time for the March meeting of the board of directors—"

"Montgomery, do you see that fine night sky? Beautiful, isn't it? You'd never guess there was any trouble on other worlds when the stars shine like that."

"You're quite worried about Venus, Mr. Ballinger, as I understand."

"Yes. News has reached me which complicates our Venus problem. I believe you know of it."

"The continent which contains your city of guinea pigs has undergone a geological change, I understand. A sort of face-lifting?"

"At one side of the continent, yes. A sinking at the other. Our own coastlines have experienced simpler, slower movements. But the swiftness and severity of this Venus action has probably been attended by some pretty drastic upheavals. In short, I'm very much afraid that the tiny stream which trickled past my city of Zattzones may have gone into reverse."

"With a damaging effect?"

"I don't know, but I'm worried. To the north were endless acres of purple mud flats in what the geologists describe as an age-old land. My native Zattzones may have had to move out of a stream of muddy water. At best, they may have had to channel it past the city. Anyway I'm concerned. I feel sure that the long silence from that quarter must be related to this geological change. I don't know why those Venus authorities can't come through with faster reports on their own planetary conditions, but you know Venus."

"What of the two men you've sent to investigate the long silence of our own Dr. Douglas?"

"I expect to send another man to reinforce them."

Montgomery was ready at once to act upon this decision. "Shall I equip another man, then, as I did Conwell and Clayton?"

"The supply shop will be open at the spaceport. You should be able to get all the necessary equipment together yet tonight, in fact, within the next two hours."

"Tonight?" Montgomery considered himself a man of action, and was often surprised to discover how far ahead Ballinger has already carried his own plans.

"A ship leaves for Venus at dawn," Ballinger said.

"Then you've already chosen a man for the job? Can you tell me what size clothes he wears?"

"The same size as I wear."

"He should be here to try on the shoes."

"My size will be right."

MONTGOMERY turned to study Ballinger's expression but it revealed nothing. A rather tall man in his middle forties, dark-complexioned, with a dark-thick mustache and heavy eyebrows, he had the look of strength blended with a well-controlled intellectual and emotional reserve. Montgomery held him in high admiration and a little awe.

"This man you're sending," Montgomery said cautiously, "—er—is there any chance that he should be present for your March meeting of the board of directors?"

Ballinger's eyes showed a faint smile. "My instructions for the March meeting will be found in the usual place."

"I see. And should I draw funds for this man? For the records, it would

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seem the thing. Unless I have a record of his name and address in order to record everything, including his pay, it would appear highly irregular."

"Very well, make a complete record as you did for the other two."

"What name shall I use, Mr. Ballinger?"

Ballinger picked up a scratch pad and a pencil. "What name would you suggest?"

"John Doe? John Ballinger Doe?"

"Hardly. Here. See what you can get by scrambling the letters in the name Ballinger."

Montgomery took the pencil, jotted down the letters on the scratch pad and came up with a new combination.

"How's this? A distinctive name, would you say?"

On the pad were the letters G-E-L-L B-R-A-I-N. Ballinger smiled. "Do you pronounce the G like a J? Come, now, Montgomery. Your subconscious is showing."

"You don't like it?"

"It appears to reflect a subterranean doubt on my whole plan."

"I'm sorry, sir. What would you suggest?"

Ballinger took the pencil, rescrambled the letters, and scribbled off a signature. "There—there's the name of the man who is catching the dawn ship to Venus, written in his own handwriting."

The phone rang. It was a message that had been radioed in from Venus. The officials there had reported a chance discovery of a murder out in Oojagg Land. The victim was a man named Clayton, whose credentials showed that he was an employee of Ballinger. . . . No, the report made no mention of any other name.

"Well," Ballinger said, discussing the message with Montgomery, "obviously we've planned this deal none too soon. Action, Montgomery!"

"Action, Mr. Ballinger!"

CHAPTER III

WHEN Ronnie Conwell spilled downward through the suddenly formed vortex of creamy mud, all he knew was that he was bursting for a breath of air. His seconds of life were numbered. Trying to climb back to the surface was a futile fight. The unseen force swept him down relentlessly. The whole weight of the mud-filled river pounded down on him.

Then all at once he knew that a blast of air was around him. He heard the splash and thud of the avalanche of mud echoing in a strange emptiness. Tearing at his mud-covered face with muddy hands, tumbling fast, he burst out of the cloud of thick slime. His lips parted and he drank in air.

He spat mud, blew mud from his nostrils, beat mud off his face, clawed mud out of his hair. He had tumbled onto a warm floor of some sort—everything was blackness. The heaps of inpouring river rolled him along like an ocean wave beating a swimmer onto the beach. He could see nothing.

He had smeared his eyes, forced them open, stared into the pitch blackness. Sight had no meaning. The tunnel, if such it was, seemed to welcome the whole inpouring river; yet, strangely, the break in the ceiling of the tunnel seemed to be clogging shut, closing off. The thudding diminished. The splashing simmered down to seeping and gurgling of thinner streams. Ronnie, on hands and knees, crawled along the warm stone floor knowing that, miraculously, he had escaped death.

Groping along, he encountered a barrier, a low stone wall. A pool of

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water accumulated against the obstacle. He washed the dripping mud from his body. However inky the water must have been, he was thankful for this much of a bath.

Beyond this bit of wall he could feel nothing. There was only space and blackness. How far might this tunnel extend?

Cautiously he moved back to explore with his hands the heaps of stiffening mud that had come down with him. What a piece of luck it would have been if he could have recovered his pistol, lost in the fall.

But that was too much to hope for. After a few moments of groping, he gave it up as a lost cause.

He listened, wishing he might catch some clue to what had happened overhead. Had the water slitter, in dying, thrashed about and struck the mud boat—or had the canny Oojaggs safely turned back? All of that was in another world from this, he suddenly realized. The Oojaggs, by this time, had marked him off as a sure casualty and that was that.

NOW, BREATHING more freely, Ronnie tried lowering himself over the bit of wall. He found another floor on the other side, about four feet down. He moved along for several feet. He stopped, aware that sounds were coming from a new direction.

Light seeped in from somewhere. Outlines of the walls emerged from the darkness. Voices were coming with the light. Ronnie edged toward a darker corner and waited.

Whatever this place was, it was obviously inhabited. The inhabitants had evidently heard the break-through of the river overhead and were on their way to inspect the damages.

And then Ronnie knew.

This was the city he was looking for, that he had set out to find.

His immediate enclosure might be one room of one building. It might be an arched covering over a roof. It might be a passage from the roof of one house to the attic of another—that really made no difference. The important thing was, this was it—the city of the Zattzones.

In time he would learn the circumstances of the coming of the muddy river, brought by the geological changes somewhere far below the surface. The continent had settled down to a more comfortable position. The north-flowing rivulet had become a south-flowing channel of mud—and the inhabitants of this deep-rooted little city had stood their ground. They had built conduits, small ones at first, then larger. Then, as the tide of muddy waters kept rising, they had shelved over their lines of buildings, until at last they were lost in a little world of their own *underneath!*

Ronnie crowded back into a dark corner.

Eight Zattzones ascended to his level and trudged along, some of them carrying lanterns.

"Never an end!" they were muttering in their Zattzone tongue. "Always another patch job!"

Such patient-looking souls! Ronnie watched wide-eyed. They were just like their pictures. They talked just like the recorded voices he had studied on his space trip to Venus. He felt that he knew them already. Those smooth voices, those guileless faces.

They possessed catlike features, with wide gray eyes beneath thick capsule-shaped black brows. Their bodies, smooth and salmon red, were much like the human body in general contour, tapering at the extremities of arms and legs into fragile six-fingered hands and six-toed feet.

Naked except for loin cloths, they

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carried their light tools or weapons in bright red shoulder-hung belts. They went to work the instant their lights showed the break in the arched ceiling. With practiced motions they went after the pyramids of stiffening mud. They built coverings of masonry that wedged up like a valve into the ceiling.

Ronnie hoped to remain hidden until they moved off; then he would follow their light. He was fascinated, meanwhile. These were Ballinger's handpicked Venusians—his guinea pigs—from whom the world's most sensational adjustment hormones could be extracted.

These were the source of Ballinger's precious serums—and in what peril they lived! Ronnie winced at the thought.

THE REPAIR job was near completion when four more Zattzones arrived and then the talk broke out afresh.

"Why do we go on living down here? It's more dangerous every hour!"

So they were uneasy? Yes, they were existing in the shadow of peril, and were aware of it—and angry, under the surface.

"Why?" they kept asking in their own tongue. "Why? Why?"

They looked back, as if to make certain some higher authority were not listening in. Ronnie hugged the shadows, straining to interpret what he was overhearing.

"Why do we remain here?"

"I say we are cowards. There are enough of us to defy him. We could march out onto the land above and be free."

"He says he could bring a whole army from the earth. He says we must stay. He says we have been bought by his master, the Magnificent Ballinger."

"We cannot be bought. We have our own governor and our own laws. No Earth man owns us."

"Unfortunately, our own governor has been sleeping for a very long time."

"He was forced to sleep!" one of the Zattzones said bitterly, slicing the air with a sharp pointed bar. "He was struck by a needle. Ponjon wanted him to sleep so we would not have a governor."

"And we obey Ponjon like blind fish because we are afraid he will put us to sleep."

"And so he would, let none of us doubt it. This very hour Ponjon is administering some executions."

Ponjon! Ronnie knew that name. It was among the list of names of Earth men whom he would encounter along his way. Ponjon? Why, that was the hunchbacked assistant who was supposed to be working in this Zattzone city, an assistant to Dr. Douglas who had charge of the experimental base here.

"Someone is listening," one of the Zattzones suddenly spoke out. He turned the lantern and the light caught Ronnie squarely.

"Yeee-eeek!"

THE WILD moment of shouting made Ronnie feel foolish and unnecessary. Quickly the leaders of the group recovered themselves. They came at him, jabbering, brandishing weapons. Who was he? Where had he come from? What did he want?

"You are a spy for Ponjon!"

"No, no!" Ronnie protested. "I come in peace. I come as your friend. Take me to see Dr. Douglas and your kindness will be rewarded."

"We shall take you to Ponjon."

"Not Ponjon. Dr. Douglas. Isn't he here?"

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"He is here, indeed. You may see him also. We shall take you to see Ponjon."

Like stuck records they held to that theme, and Ronnie decided there was nothing to do but submit.

They were gentle, he thought, but quite cautious. There were twelve of them, and they took the gentle precaution to bind him hand and foot.

They lifted him down to another level, and carried him through what was obviously a street.

Once it had been a sunlit street, Ronnie thought. In spite of his discomfort he kept his eyes wide open to make the most of the tour. The darkness, broken by slices of light from the passing shops and houses, made the place seem a tragedy of eternal night. Only a village, a one-street town. Spectators were awe struck along the way. Red bodies of naked children and half naked women appeared in doorways, staring at him as he was carried along.

They did not shout or laugh or mock. They were, he thought, a surprisingly quiet and orderly people—or were they so oppressed by a hunchback named Ponjon that they were afraid to behave naturally?

Ponjon! The pictures of that character which Ronnie had once seen now came back from some dusty corner of his mind—a man stunted of stature, whose huge head was thrust forward on his massive round shoulders, whose arms hung close to his body as if withered. A wide dark mustache above an evil-looking mouth.

Ponjon! With what mingled respect and hatred these natives spoke his name! Had he been promoted to leadership at this Zattzone medical center? Surely not. Ballinger would have mentioned it. Yet—

They entered a wide double-winged door, and Ronnie was borne into an inner room where lavender lights along the walls made everything look weirdly white.

They laid him down on a stone bench and told him he could wait there until Ponjon returned. Ponjon would not be long, they said. He had gone to attend a routine execution of Zattzone criminals, and such affairs usually went through like clockwork.

They were gone. They had closed the door after them. Ronnie began to struggle at his ropes.

Then the door opened, just a crack. Eyes were looking in. It was a long moment before the door opened wider and a man entered. To Ronnie's deep relief it was the one person he wanted to see more than anyone else in the world—Dr. Douglas.

CHAPTER IV

DR. DOUGLAS was a cautious man, to say the least. Ronnie talked like a whirlwind, and the doctor blinked at him. Untie his ropes? The doctor wasn't sure whether he should.

"I am no longer in charge here, you see," Dr. Douglas said lamely.

"I was instructed by Ballinger to see you, not Ponjon."

"Yes. Yes, I'm sorry. You see Mr. Ballinger is too far away to know."

"I don't get it. What's happened? Have you quit? You were high mogul of this medical department, with a chance to become famous—"

"Please." The doctor raised his hand in a gesture of helplessness.

Ronnie snapped impatiently, "You can at least cut these ropes and get me some clothing. I'll take the responsibility, if your action has to be squared with Ponjon. But I'm darned if I can understand why you'd turn your position over to an assistant. In the first place he's not half quali-

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fied—"

"Please," Dr. Douglas said again, and it was plain that he was deeply wounded by something that Ronnie couldn't hope to fathom instantly. He untied Ronnie's ropes, talking gently. Ronnie washed and dressed while he listened to the doctor's strange story. "I have been the victim of a mysterious illness. For many days I slept."

"You were doped?" Ronnie asked.

"I must have been. Ponjon wouldn't admit it, but that must have been it. When I began to recover I saw that Ponjon had taken full charge. He had these natives marching to his orders. He was a clever one. A disciplinarian. A hard master. They danced to his music." The doctor sighed. "It would have been dangerous to change leaders again. He held the power. I stood by."

"So you became *his* assistant? Is that it?" Ronnie drew a deep indignant breath. This was getting at it. The whole setup that Ballinger had so carefully organized had broken down with Douglas' illness. Ponjon had usurped the power for his own self-gratification. "But what about the serums? Why didn't Ponjon keep on sending out the regular supply, if he meant to take charge properly?"

"You haven't received any for months, have you?"

"No. That's why I'm here. Ballinger sent me to find out who was asleep at the switch."

"I knew that would come."

"So I'm here to put a stick of dynamite under someone. Either you take back your responsibility or I'll see that Ponjon—"

"Careful!" Dr. Douglas used a fearful tone. "We don't give orders to Ponjon. We take them. You'd better be cautious."

"In my vocabulary it's Ballinger who gives the orders," Ronnie said, glaring. He hated to be rough with the doctor but it seemed to be necessary. "I mean to see that the serums start moving again. Well, what are you shaking your head about?"

"There's something else I haven't told you," the tall, languid doctor said sadly. "The serums have gone bad."

"Bad? How? What do you mean?"

"I discovered it several months ago. That's why we've quit shipping them out."

"But your methods were working fine—"

"It's strange but I found that everything began to change. The blood characteristics of these people aren't what they were. They don't test out. Our guinea pigs here have made it plain that the serums just don't test out."

"Good Lord! After all those wonderful effects—"

"They're gone. Ballinger's boon to mankind has melted away."

"And your chance to share his fame—"

"Gone! Now you understand my discouragement." The doctor appeared to be on the verge of tears. "Sometimes I wish I had never come out of that long sleep."

Ronnie couldn't help being sympathetic, yet there was little time to indulge the doctor's sorrows. If Ponjon was due to return at any minute, the most must be made of this chance to talk with Douglas alone.

Ronnie went back to ask of the coming of the mud.

THE TIPPING of the continent, he learned, had caused the Oojaggs to move down into this territory. Their fertile lands up the valley were being washed away. Erosion on a spectacular scale turned these one-time upland val-

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leys into channels of creamy purple mud.

"The very physiological virtue of these Zattzones—their adjustable quality—was in a way their downfall." The doctor's affection for the Zattzones was unmistakable. "If they had been less adaptable, they wouldn't have stayed in the path of rising geological dangers. They'd have got out. Instead, they stuck tight. They threw all their energies into building a patchwork river bed over the top of their city. So here we are, existing under it all."

"There's certainly no reason for staying," Ronnie muttered. "It's dangerous. And they're unhappy about it, I overheard enough to know that."

"Ponjon won't let them leave."

"Why not?"

"Here he can control them. He loves his power. He had them regimented like clockwork. They might as well be slaves in a concentration camp."

"You can't stand for that."

"His excuse is that moving out would be an admission of defeat—a proof that they're no longer able to adjust—"

"To hell with their adjusting!" Ronnie snorted. "If he can't get good serums anyway, their lives at least ought to be considered. They're in a death trap here. I think I see an angle."

"Yes?"

"Why not demand that Ponjon set up a control group on the outside—say fifty or a hundred Zattzones to start with. Get them out of this underworld. See if the desired hormones don't come back into the blood. What do you think?"

"You believe the mud has influenced them, don't you? Well, your theory has already been tried. It didn't work. He fixed it up for thirty-seven of them up there on the uplands to the west. His loyal military force kept bringing them back for tests—"

"So?"

"A very evil strain showed up right away. Far from getting any desired serums he got the seeds of a revolt on his hands. Now he's bringing them back three or four at a time—"

"For further testing?"

"For execution."

"No!"

The doctor spoke in a hushed voice. "That's where he's spending his time these days. At the execution chamber."

Ronnie's voice grew harsh with outrage. "My heavens, man! You mean these Zattzones are letting him get away with that? You can't adjust people by murdering them!"

"What did you say?"

THE VOICE came from the darkness beyond the door, a sharp-edged voice like a freshly sharpened steel blade.

"Ponjon!" Dr. Douglas whispered. His face was ashen.

"You can't adjust people by murdering them, you say? Very interesting. Who are you?" The owner of the voice was coming in.

Ronnie hurled back his answer without waiting to take his measure of the man.

"I'm an agent from Ballinger. Who are you? Come in and show your face."

Ponjon stalked in out of the shadows. Ronnie tried to take in the sight of him all at once, a curious blend of sinister keenness and animal stealth. Large and hunched, he held his arms close to his body as if they were withered and helpless. Nevertheless, the right arm came upward slowly as Ponjon approached. He was offering a

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handshake.

"An agent from Ballinger!" The manner and voice were at once extremely cordial. Ponjon was smiling through narrowed eyes. "Who could be more welcome!"

Hatred had stiffened through Ronnie's spine at the sight of the man. But the handshake was his for the taking and he responded, clasping Ponjon's hand. At the same instant Ponjon's left hand came up with a quick strike like a rattlesnake and plunged a needle into Ronnie's outstretched arm.

"No—no—please!" Douglas cried feebly. "Not yet!"

But Ponjon had done it, and the sudden jab of the needle gave Ronnie an immediate feeling of paralysis. Sleep came in upon him. The world around him spun for a moment and then everything was gone.

CHAPTER V

HOW MUCH time had passed? Hours and hours, perhaps weeks or even months. Ronnie had no way to guess. He had lost all touch with the familiar world. The fact that he was here on an urgent errand bore down upon him in his hazy wakeful hours. He knew he was being drugged again and again. His stupor was too deep for clear thought.

Sometimes, awakening, he would feel that he was slowly starving. Then again he would awaken to find that Douglas was beside him in his cell, feeding him. Douglas would leave, locking the barred door, and again he would sleep.

Even in sleep, impressions filtered through to register in his mind.

He knew that the feverish life of the Zattzones was going on around him. Bursting ceilings. Bursting sidewalls. Swift working brigades patching the breaks. An unending effort of frantic patchwork to keep the city intact... Equally frantic efforts to recover the lost qualities of the serums... Fanatical efforts to keep military order... Marching brigades of militarized Zattzones, moving in step obediently.

Unhappy people!

The more Ronnie came back to wakefulness, the more he brooded over Ponjon's cruelties.

"He's haunting my dreams," Ronnie confessed to the doctor.

"You're coming out of it," Douglas said. "If he thinks you're getting well enough to make trouble, he'll drug you down again. That's how he tamed me."

Okay, Ronnie would take fair warning. His best chance was to feign illness whenever Ponjon came near. But one day he confided to the doctor, "All I want is one good clean chance to call his bluff—with strength enough to follow through. The way I feel today, I could break out of this cell and rip his fake power to shreds."

Dr. Douglas hushed him.

"You have a neighbor... Next cell... Sleeping."

A slight groan sounded from the adjoining cell. Ronnie saw that the form lying there on an improvised bed of swamp reeds was an Earth man. Like Ronnie, he was clad in flimsy prisoner garments. His left arm was in a cast.

"The Oojaggs tried to kill him as he crossed the swamps." The doctor added with an air of pride, "I take credit for saving his life. He would have bled to death."

"Well!" Ronnie saw a glow of achievement in the doctor's eye that looked hopeful for one so badly beaten. Was there a chance the doctor

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might outgrow his defeated spirit in time?

"So far," the doctor said, "the needle has not been given to this one. The wound, Ponjon believes, will keep him incapacitated."

"Is he in serious condition?"

"No longer. But, confidentially, I have been advising him all along to take his time."

"Who is he?"

"He has given his name as Glen Blair."

"Do you know him well enough to trust him?"

"Not exactly. He talked in such a confused manner. His hike through the swamps fairly unnerved him. He barely escaped the Oojaggs."

Glen Blair. Ronnie couldn't remember having heard of him.

"He was sent, as you were, by Ballinger," the doctor said. "He asked the same questions you asked about the serums. If you talk with him, I suggest you be careful how you bestow your confidence. He may be closer to Ponjon than we think."

"I'll be careful," Ronnie promised. "And, Doc—"

"Yes?"

"You get yourself over being scared and I'm going to see that you win back your rightful authority."

Dr. Douglas gave Ronnie a mysterious look. He said timidly, in a low whisper, "I left something for you."

A FEW MINUTES after Dr. Douglas went out, Ronnie rose and moved about, feeling the old strength surge through his body.

Later, he stood facing the tall stranger who occupied the cell next to his.

The stranger was clean-shaven. He possessed a strong face, a high forehead, clear dark eyes. Light streaks bordered his thin black eyebrows. He sat in a relaxed manner on the stone bench in his cell, brushing bits of lint from the bandaged arm.

"You're Glen Blair?" Ronnie said. "The doctor told me about you. He said that Ballinger sent you, and you had a difficult time getting through. My name is Ronnie Conwell."

The tall man seemed glad to rise and shake hands through the bars. Then he returned to his seat glumly. "Tell me, Conwell, did—did our employer—Mr. Ballinger—give you any warning about this river of mud?"

"No."

"Bad deal."

"I figure he didn't know about it himself."

"H-m-m." The tall man murmured to himself uneasily. Then, "Is he paying you enough to offset all this hell?"

"I'm not complaining," Ronnie said. "A bargain is a bargain."

The tall man muttered, "I suppose so... He never told me I'd get myself shot up by unfriendly natives. Still—"

"On a job like this a guy takes his own chances," Ronnie said casually.

After a silence Glen Blair said, "I guess you and Mr. Ballinger must be good buddies, the way you stick up for him."

Ronnie mused, "I just work for him. Hope to meet him some day. Have you ever met him?"

"I've seen him," Glen Blair said. "Can't say that I was ever formally introduced."

"I remember his picture," Ronnie said. "He wears a thick dark mustache. Thick dark eyebrows. Impressive face."

The tall man passed a finger over his pencil-thin brow. Ronnie flashed a glance at him, wondering if he had been here long enough to recognize the approaching footsteps. Ponjon's!

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Ponjon moved in, swinging his limp arms more briskly than usual.

Something flashed in Ponjon's right hand. Obviously he intended them to see it—the needle-pointed instrument. It was a part of his threatening entrance.

"My prize prisoners," he said.

For an impressive minute or two he glared from one to the other, his narrowed eyes casting a weird yellow light. His thin lips were spread to reveal the hard set of his teeth; perhaps he intended a friendly grin; it could only come out as a look of evil. Sadistic satisfactions were in the making within that brutal head that thrust forward from his great hunched shoulders.

His manner showed he knew that talk had been going on between his two "prize prisoners". He disdained to pry. He was all set to reveal a plan of his own that would put them both on the defensive.

"I have a question for the two of you. Think well before you answer. A false answer would give me the pleasure of killing you. *Pleasure!*"

"Go ahead," Ronnie said, "the cards are all in your hands."

BUT RONNIE, sitting carelessly on the stone floor with one hand slightly back of him, was highly aware of a joker in his own hand. The "something" Dr. Douglas had left him was a ray pistol.

"I plan to develop my own serums." Ponjon paced back and forth in front of the two cells. "My authority here is well established. I have no further need for the name of Ballinger."

The tall man, Ronnie noticed, was staring with frank curiosity.

"From this moment," Ponjon said, "the industry belongs to me. I claim it by right of having earned it, keeping order. Otherwise the Zattzones would have left for higher ground. Here they're forced to adjust—more and more they're compelled to adjust. Their adjustment is the key to my fortune. And now, my proposition."

He drew himself up, and the yellow of his eyes was like fire as he looked from Glen to Ronnie.

"Which of you will come into my industry as my assistants? The offer is open to one or both."

Neither Ronnie nor Glen Blair spoke.

"What's the matter? Scared? You needn't be. Your esteemed ex-boss is a whole planet away. You are free. I can assure you a good deal." Ponjon opened the doors of each cell and stood waiting for his prisoners to advance. "What do you say?"

"What's the point of giving us a choice?" Ronnie said skeptically. "We're your prisoners. You can tell us to submit or die."

"Very true," Ponjon said with a twisted smile. "But I would prefer that my new staff come to me willingly."

"Willingly, hell!" Ronnie snapped. "This medical laboratory is the property of Ballinger. You can't just take over—"

"You're turning down my proposition?"

"You're damned right." Ronnie's concealed hand tightened upon the ray pistol. He came to his feet, returning Ponjon's glare defiantly through the open cell door.

Ponjon, white with anger, looked to the tall stranger. He weighed the bright needle-pointed instrument in his hand. "And what about you, Blair?"

"Interested," Blair said, seeming to look at the floor of the cell, his eyes half closed. "If you think you can use me—"

"I'll know in about thirty seconds,"

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Ponjon said, beckoning him out of his cell. "Take this needle and administer sleep to the sucker who just refused me."

Glen Blair hesitated. "I have a bad arm—"

"You're yellow!"

"I'm not yellow!"

"If you're working for me, the first lesson is to obey orders—and no excuses. *Zattzones!*" The bark of Ponjon's voice brought four of his trusted armed natives in through the door. They stood two at either side of Ponjon, ready for any emergency. Ponjon nodded, "Now! Take the needle, Blair, and put that prisoner to sleep."

He started to hand the instrument to Blair when Ronnie's hard voice commanded, "Drop it!"

Ronnie's concealed hand came up fast with the flash of a weapon.

CHAPTER VI

"*WATER slitters! Water slitters! Water slitters!*"

The cry rang through the cavernous city. Racing natives pounded through the half lighted streets and dashed in at the entrance of the prison.

"Water slitters! The west entrance! The Oojaggs have let them in! They're coming this way!"

The wild chase was joined from all directions. Ponjon's armed men, ignoring Ronnie's threatening ray pistol, suddenly broke and ran.

"Everybody *north!*" In the Zattzone tongue, the equivalent of a northward direction was indicated. Exits to dry land lay in that course, and women and children were bounding at full speed as fast as the warning cries reached their ears.

Ronnie's threat had dissolved. Something in the strange look Glen Blair had given him had cost him a split second that might have brought Ponjon to his knees. Ponjon was off. The doctor rushed in, shouting a warning to anyone within earshot and darted out again.

Ronnie started to follow Ponjon, then paused in the doorway long enough to hurl a savage remark at Glen Blair. "You better get back on my side while there's time. I mean to get these browbeaten natives out of Ponjon's clutches. If it takes water slitters to chase them out of these damn caverns, then I say bring on the water slitters!"

Blair snapped back with a quick tongue. "Whose side are you on, Ballinger's or the Zattzones'?"

"Both. Ballinger can't do business with these people imprisoned under a river. There's no good left in them for him down here. They're *dry*." Ronnie started to run on.

Blair came after him. "What do you mean?"

"Just that. Their blood's no good any more."

"And what could *you* do about it?"

"Experiment. I've got a hunch—a theory—and it ought to be tried."

"What's your theory? Hold up a minute. Tell me—"

"Do you think I'd tell you? I don't give my theories away to traitors!" Ronnie ran. "Come on, get your damn fool self out of here!"

HE KNEW that his blast had hit Glen Blair like a blow between the eyes, but the fellow took it, muttering an unintelligible answer, and came along as fast as he could, hugging his bad arm to his side.

"Where's the doctor? Douglas, where are you?" Ronnie shouted as he ran. Not knowing his directions, the only thing to do was to run with the crowd. Why didn't Ponjon or the doctor or some of the Zattzone officers direct the mob? Everything was helter-

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skelter. Ronnie's course led down what must have been a side street. Brighter lights were ahead.

"How do you get out of here?" came Glen Blair's voice from back of Ronnie.

"You don't come in in the first place," Ronnie shot back. "Ballinger should have thought twice before he sent you."

"Take it easy, Conwell," Blair said. "We're all in this together."

"Together, he says! A couple minutes ago you were ready to stab me with a needle. And the next thing one of those water slitters would have made salad out of me."

The way was blocked. A group of terrorized, howling Zattzones backed up on Ronnie. A water slitter's head showed up over the crowd. It was crawling through the lighted street beyond. Ronnie heard the curious whistling swish of its fifty-foot body as it slithered along the lighted street. Its eyes glistened wildly as it turned toward the entrance of the darker passage. Gunfire from the crowd turned it away. It plunged ahead, its tail slapping the walls as it passed.

Ronnie had tried to shoot at it, too, and the gun he held gave out with a dead click. A dud! Ponjon had known all the time, of course. He must have planted the trick gun with the doctor to try him out, and the doctor, lacking the nerve to use it, had slipped it hopefully to Ronnie. Ronnie threw it to the floor.

Now the crowd surged forward again, streaming toward the northern exits that would bring them up on dry land. Ronnie would have followed if he hadn't been halted.

Four of Ponjon's officers backed him up against a pillar.

"Tie him up," Ponjon commanded, coming out of the shadows. He had set the trap and waited, and now he ordered the Zattzone stooges into action. His glittering eye was lighted with sadistic pleasure. He called to Glen Blair and ordered him to stand by. Then he turned his full attention to Ronnie, whose arms were bound tight to a pillar of stone. "The water slitter will find its way back through this alley in a few minutes. We'll just have time to finish a bit of unfinished business."

"What do you gain by torturing me?" Ronnie demanded.

"I want your secret!"

"What do you mean? I've got no secret."

"Don't weasel," Ponjon snarled. "I've got ears all over this city. You've called it a hunch—a theory. You said it might bring back the lost properties in the Zattzone blood. All right, talk."

"You forget I'm working for Ballinger."

"In another minute you're working for nobody. In another minute—"

A cry from down the dark way announced that one of the water slitters was coming back.

"Stop it!" Ponjon ordered. "Get a net over it."

THE MAD scramble came closer. Ronnie strained at his ropes. He wished for the strength of a Samson, to bring the ceiling and walls down on all of them—yes, and the river of mud above. Out of the corner of his eyes he saw Dr. Douglas and several of the Zattzone police struggling with ropes that held back a huge net. Inside the net, fighting and thrashing about like a trapped tiger, was the big water slitter! The beast was held prisoner. But it kept working its way up through the narrow street, gaining a few feet each time it lunged at the web of ropes. It struck one of the Zattzones. He fell with a cry. Tangled in the web, he was dragged along. The

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thick serpent-like body of the monster rolled across him and crushed the cries out of him.

"Hold back, damn it!" Ponjon shouted. "One more minute. All right, smart boy. Give us your theory."

Ronnie kicked out and knocked Ponjon's legs out from under him. Ponjon sprawled. The needle-pointed instrument rolled to the floor. Glen Blair rushed forward, reaching for it. Ponjon was quicker. He snatched it, then rolled to his feet and sprang back defensively.

Glen Blair went after him, one-armed. Blair's right fist swung. Ponjon tried to lash down with the needle, but Blair's blow caught him on the jaw. He staggered. Blair must have put dynamite in that single punch. Ponjon's eyes rolled. The needle-pointed instrument slipped from his hand and Blair caught it in mid-air and instantly plunged it into Ponjon's side.

"You damn traitor!" Ponjon gasped as he sank to the floor. His eyelids drooped. Blair left him and turned to Ronnie.

"Give me a hand, here, Doc!" Blair shouted. "A knife—anything. Get this man untied, quick. My bad arm—"

Bad arm or not, Blair was using the fingers of both hands at the knots. The doctor was presently busy, shouting orders at the Zattzones who were helping hold the beast back.

The Zattzones tied the rope ends to anything that would hold. For a moment the water slitter was held, but only for a moment. The blazing-eyed creature began to lunge like a fast-action battering ram. The ropes strained. Walls cracked. Ceilings broke. Water and mud gushed down and chunks of masonry ripped loose.

Then everyone was running again. The bonds slipped from Ronnie's body. Glen Blair pulled him free. "Get on! Get on!"

"Come on, yourself!" Dr. Douglas shouted, joining Blair and Ronnie in the hard chase toward the northern exits. No one bothered to look back at Ponjon, who had relaxed into a deep sleep on the floor. It was all his city now—his and the water slitters'.

UP IN THE sunshine, safe on high land, Ronnie watched the Zattzones gather into a quiet assembly to talk over plans for a new city. Their gift of readjusting themselves was remarkable, no doubt about it. The bold ones among them would go back and salvage some of their undamaged properties from the ruins—as soon as the path was clear. Meanwhile, the air of freedom was good to breathe, and no one mourned the loss of Ponjon, not even his most trusted ex-officers.

"I've changed my opinion of you, Glen Blair," Ronnie said as he, Blair and Dr. Douglas talked things over. "If I haven't thanked you for saving my life—thank you."

Glen Blair smiled. "It's a valuable life. After all, you still have that secret theory."

"If it's any good," Ronnie said, "Ballinger may hear of it in time... On the other hand, everything may go so well from now on that he'll never hear of it."

'Would you care to tell us?" Blair asked.

"I shouldn't be popping off without consulting Ballinger."

"I have a little secret of my own," Blair said. "I think we all might confide in each other."

"Whatever the doc says. Douglas, now that you're again in command, what do you say?"

"I say we trust each other. I'm sure Ballinger would approve, after what we've gone through together."

"Okay," Ronnie said. "My guess is that these natives lost the blood char-

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acteristics we wanted when they lost their freedom. Their power to adapt was linked up with their right to talk and laugh and take their troubles in their stride. When Ponjon bore down on them and put their lives in strait-jackets, the smoldering resentment fed poisons into their blood stream. It's well-known that anger and hatred can do just that. So—"

"So the poisons may have destroyed the hormones we were after!" Dr. Douglas said. "I see it. Their blood values were linked to their *freedom!*"

"That was my theory," Ronnie said. "The way they're getting organized to start life over, without Ponjon, is all to the good. In a short time they may restore themselves to normal, and our contract with them can be resumed—"

"On a friendly basis, as Ballinger originally conceived it," the doctor interpolated.

"Exactly." Ronnie turned to Glen Blair. "And now—your secret?"

The tall man smiled, a trifle shy over what he had decided to reveal. "My real name isn't Glen Blair. If you'll scramble the letters in Glen Blair you'll know what my last name is. I came because I like to know exactly what loyal workers go through —and I wouldn't have missed this for the world."

"Do you mean to tell us—" Ronnie gulped. For a moment the world spun, both backward and forward, and he came out of it a bit dizzy. "You mean that you're—"

"I'll have to let my mustache and eyebrows grow back before I know, for sure." The tall man was smiling broadly, his cheeks tinged with embarrassment over the irony of his situation. "But this I can tell you for certain. There are going to be high honors and generous bonuses for both of you when you make a personal visit, soon, to the offices of Ballinger."

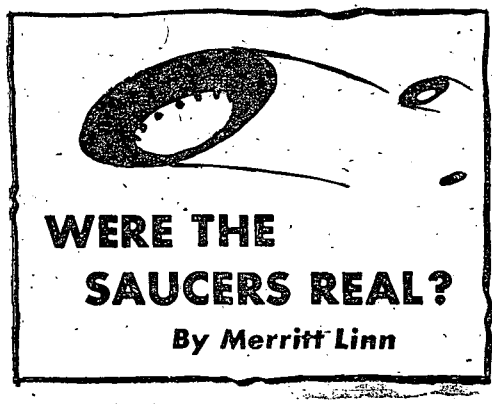
"Honors for three, you mean!" Dr. Douglas was suddenly a very positive man. "If there are any honors to be passed around, you've got to be included. Man, you were magnificent!"

"Magnificent!" Ronnie echoed, clasping Glen Blair's hand with the deepest feeling of respect he had ever known.

Douglas frowned, plainly still puzzled over something. "Just what did you say your name was? Scramble Glen Blair? I don't get it."

"You will," Glen Blair smiled. "Think it over."

THE END



THE "FLYING SAUCER" excitement has long since died down and been all but forgotten. Mention that to those who ridicule the possible existence of such things and they'll say, "See, I told you so."

But there may be more to the flying-saucer matter than we think. A short paper, read by an astronomer, before the National Capitol Astronomers in Washington recently, points this out. Reuning, a professional asdtronomer and an amateur aerodynamicist interested in eventual space flight, read an interesting paper discussing the theoretical aspects of space-ship design. In the course of this paper he made it clear that the "saucer" shape for vehicles which have to plow through heavy

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air has some nice advantages.

He suggested that when, as is likely, a ramjet design is used for the space ship in order that it be able to penetrate the atmosphere without using its precious rocket fuel, the ship be built in the form of a shallow saucer-like shape. This would serve two purposes: it would act, by virtue of its shape, as a sort of flying wing, obtaining lift from itself; and its exhaust ports would be designed, by their very nature, for the maximum heating surface per volume of gas. These are sound technical reasons; not to be classed as guesses or ideas.

The major connection, however, that Reuning's ideas have with flying saucers is this: perhaps the idea has occurred to others and perhaps, in secret, American or foreign organizations have built such machines, and the so-called "flying saucers" were actually experimental craft of this type. The idea was suggested at the time that flying saucers were possibly experimental aircraft, rockets or potential space ships. In the light of this new public knowledge, it is perfectly conceivable that that is just what they were.

Only time, of course, will tell whether or not this hypothesis is tenable. Nevertheless, it is reasonable and not beyond the realm of present technology. Flying saucers may be gone for the present, but they're not forgotten!

MAN OR APE?

By John Weston

THE BOOKS say: "Man is an animal."

And of course that's true. Skeletal structure, braincase, organic structure—all these things Man has in common with the lower animals to a greater or lesser degree.

But Man is more than an animal. That too is agreed upon by all biologists. But what is the fine distinction? Why are apes apes? And why don't apes become men?

In an effort to probe these questions two biologists, husband and wife, decided to take into their home a specimen of the highest known form of ape, the chimpanzee, rear it as they would rear a human child—with absolutely no differentiation—and then see what the results would be. They performed this incredible experiment, treating the baby chimpanzee precisely as a human child would be treated, from diapering and housebreaking to feeding with the bottle and fond caresses.

The results were these: Up until the age of three years, psychologically and mentally absolutely no difference at all could be detected between the behavior of the chimp and that of a normal human baby. Skill, learning ability, response to affection, mannerisms—all were those of a human baby. In some respects, perhaps, the chimp had a shade the better of the bargain. If you were to ignore the physical dissimilarities between the baby and the chimp you'd be unable to tell the difference between them. To that point, men are apes.

What then is the difference which occurs between the age of two and three years?

Of course the answer is obvious: the baby learns the power of speech. The ape never does!

The chimp becomes increasingly intelligent with time, but no matter what techniques were used in the experiment the chimp could not be taught to speak, either naturally or artificially, through manipulation of its mouth. Oh, a rudimentary sound parodying a word could be forced from the baby chimp, but never a real "papa" or "mama".

Speech isolates Man from the animal and, no matter what the proponents of animal communication tell you, animals do not possess an organized formal means of communicating with each other save by the most elementary of signals and symbols. Speech, the intelligent communication of facts and ideas from one animal to another, sets the human animal apart from all others. Only Man speaks!

The biologists concluded that if a human child could be brought up without contact with other intelligent human beings, it is very likely that child would remain on the ape-like level. This belief is borne out by the occasional discovery of an abandoned child who has grown to adulthood in the jungle. It is rare occurrence but it has happened and, invariably, that child-adult has remained very close to an idiot.

This knowledge that speech is the differentiating characteristic may be a painful blow to some. In fact, those of us fond of the Burroughs' "Tarzan" tales will always cherish the "language of the Great Apes." It's too bad that in reality there's no such thing—but there isn't. Yet consider what a marvelously facile instrument of communication speech is—whatever the language. It is a proud distinction that humans have at that....

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Mortality Unlimited

By

Russell Branch

A long purple jet job cruised up to the curb. Before I realized it, this guy had grabbed Lila.

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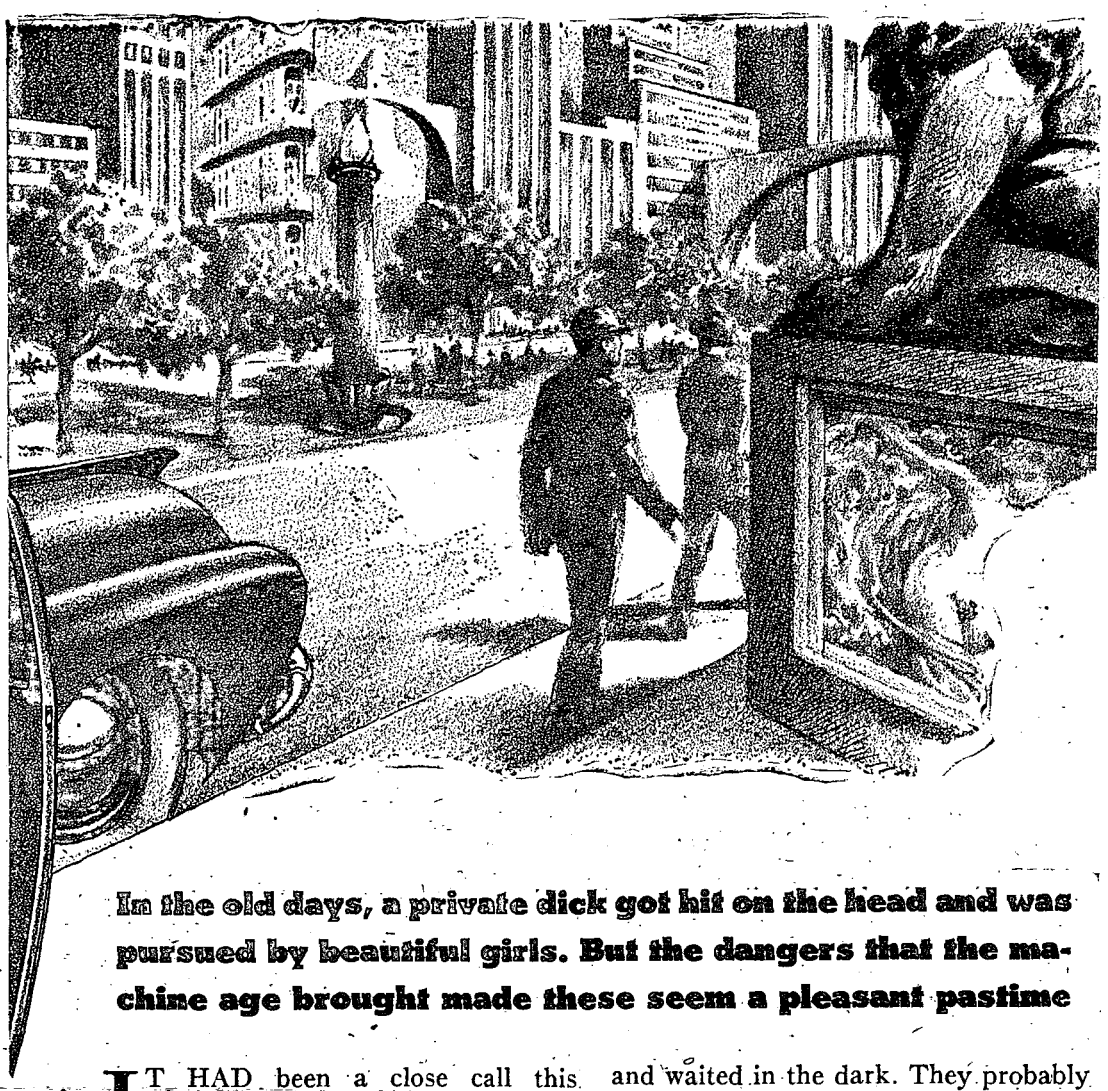

In the old days, a private dick got hit on the head and was pursued by beautiful girls. But the dangers that the machine age brought made these seem a pleasant pastime

IT HAD been a close call this time, and I still couldn't believe I'd made it. A little case of blackmail, if you're interested: a nasty bit of "official" graft with a State monitor bleeding a citizen who'd shot off his private opinions in a supposedly private videophone conversation.

I'd got the tape, all right, but the State ear had called in some pals from Security. And they'd been waiting for me, two of the boys in white, when I went to collect from my grateful client.

Now I dropped into my own chair and waited in the dark. They probably wouldn't start a door-to-door search. Not at this hour, with *their* popularity. But the flick of a new light would bring them straight to my door. So I waited, and tried to catch up with my breathing.

Three minutes must have gone by before I realized I wasn't waiting alone. But there it was, alternating with my own loud gulps of air. The faint suggestion of someone trying to swallow his own breaths, the tiny creak of the floor, the infinite rustle of fabric....

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I hesitated just long enough to focus the darker mass against the wall, and then left my chair in one long spring. For my reward I got a frightened gasp, an armful of something soft and fragrant—and then a faceful of fingernails. I held it off with one hand and turned my desk light on "dim". The Security boys might still be waiting out there on the street, but I had to see if it looked as good as it felt and smelled.

It did, and I could only stare.

She pulled her arm loose, rubbed it ruefully, and asked shakily: "Are you Mr. Nox? Mr. Ty Nox?"

I must have nodded, because she seated herself calmly in the chair I had just vacated, arranged her kirtle over a pair of legs the likes of which hadn't been seen on Earth since genetics control—and said: "I'm sorry I startled you. I turned off the light when I heard the Security whistles out on the street, because...well, because I couldn't have explained what I was doing up here."

I muttered something about some of my best friends having the same trouble, and got around the desk and into my own chair.

"I need your help, Mr. Nox. It's about my brother...."

My knee was already against the psychograph button under my desk, but that was pure habit. Even with the screen as close as the half-open drawer by my side, I still couldn't tear my eyes away.

SHE HAD a full, passionate face, with shape to match. Soft black hair with the luminous shine of deep space. Amber star-flecks in eyes that were close to brimming. You can have your psychographs.

Her brother, she told me, was one Dan Hardigan. Technician second class, employed by the Teleporto subsidiary of State Transit. Or rather, he *had* been employed there. Early this afternoon, they had called her in to see what was left of him. He had fallen into one of the transmitters. They said. Only she didn't believe it....

"Even if he *is* dead, it didn't happen the way they said! Please, Mr. Nox, please! You've got to help me."

"Why me? Why not the CSS?"

"Civil Security Service!" She gave the words the full treatment. "They told me my brother knew the risks when he accepted the assignment."

"They were right, baby, for once. Teleportation's still new—and dangerous. Your brother couldn't have been too much of a technician, to put it bluntly."

The star-flecks caught fire. "Dan knew everything there is to know. Too much, maybe, and that's why he disappeared."

"You just said they showed you his body."

"I saw a...body, yes." What she had really seen sickened briefly in her eyes again. "I'm still not convinced it was Dan."

"But you identified him?"

"They showed me these, asked if they were my brother's." She was rooting in the soft gray off-shoulder *purch*-skin. "I had to say yes, and that's all they'd listen to. Case closed, record filed."

She laid a couple of things on my desk, but I was still looking at the open purse in her lap. "Let's see that ID tag, Miss Hardigan."

The purse snapped shut. "That's mine. They kept Dan's at the CSS."

"I still want to see it," I said, and grabbed.

She snatched it away, but by that time I was around the edge of the desk and had one wrist. The purse smacked me in the face, and then I

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had both wrists. For a moment we were back where we had started—about two inches apart. Her scent, heavy, musky, had me spinning again like a meteor. Then she collapsed, sobbing gently.

The tag was forged, which is a neat trick if you can do it without changing the molecular structure of clear glastic. I can—but not that well.

I turned down the light again and grinned at her. "I'll take back what I said about Dan being a lousy mechanic."

"I...I don't know what you mean."

"Your name isn't Hardigan, and this Dan isn't your brother."

She stared at me, choking back a sob.

"Let's start clean, Lila—or is that a phony, too?"

FOR A MOMENT her face showed fight again. Then it went empty. She had taken on all the trouble she could, without spilling over. "That much of it's right. Lila Munro. Dan Hardigan isn't my brother."

"Which is why you don't dare kick up more tail dust at CSS?"

She nodded, and raised her eyes defiantly. "I'm not pure-line. My grandfather went out on Mars Number Three. He married out there."

If she expected me to look shocked, she was disappointed. "Nobody could ever mistake you for Miss Eugenics of 2050. But that's still okay in my book, Lila."

A little warmth came back into her face. "I guess you can guess the rest."

"Sure. They turned you down on the marriage permit. This sister-brother act was the only way you could get around the housing deal.... And don't look like that. Lots of kids doing it, and I can't say I blame them. Let's get back to the point."

The stars began to shine again. "Then you *will* help me?"

"I haven't said, yet. Where'd you find out about me, how'd you know where to find me?"

She mentioned a name. A very important Name—which is just the reason I won't repeat it here. Then I asked her if she had any money. That got the usual reaction, so I gave her my usual speech.

"Lila, you're looking at an anomaly, an anachronism. Something from the gasoline buggy days. What they used to call a 'private detective'. But there just ain't anything 'private' these days, not even crime.

"Any crime today is a crime against the State. And since the State happily disregards its own crimes against the individual, they can also disregard me. The need for me does not exist. Therefore, I don't exist. Therefore, I don't need food or clothing or any of the other things which the State so generously provides its useful citizens. Therefore..." and I paused for the punch-line, "...I will have to ask you for at least a thousand credits."

Her eyes widened incredulously.

"Not in work credits, either. It's got to be in those nice pink fun-slips. In case you don't know it, there *is* a black market in those."

She glanced involuntarily at the *purch*-skin purse. She said slowly, reluctantly, "I've got just eight hundred and seventy-six."

"All right. It's *moggle*, as they say on Mars."

She was still looking at the purse. "Mine and Dan's, and three years without a vacation or a concert at the Rainbow or even a Saturday night bottle of jola.... Three years, Mr. Nox! You know why?"

I shrugged.

"So that someday we could walk

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aboard a Mars freighter. So that some day we could hold our heads up again, and live like man and wife, and raise a family. Some day...and somewhere."

I held out my hand. "Half of it now, the rest when I finish the job. They won't do you any good anyway without Dan, and maybe he did walk into that transmutor."

SHE DIDN'T much like me any more, but at least I had snapped her out of it. She tossed the pink recreation slips on my desk almost contemptuously, then shoved across the two objects she'd taken out before.

One was a heavy man's ring with a polished bit of herculium set in it. Homemade. Lots of the kids had brought them back. I looked at her questioningly. "What about it?"

"It was too small," she said. "Dan wore it on his little finger and it was still too small. He couldn't get it off. But it was on the third finger of that ...what they showed me." She paused. "I *watched* them take it off, Mr. Nox. Third finger, and it came off easily."

I thought it over. I thought of teleportation, the new wonder science. I thought of what it had done to the first experimental animals—before the SPCA jumped in and the public raised a howl that limited further experimentation to inanimate objects.

But I didn't say what I was thinking. I reached instead for the other item. This was a cheap standard-pulse chronometer, the kind you can buy in any exchange for five credits. The dial was smashed and the works had stopped at 10:24 Earth time, this morning.

"You know they can teleport anything now," the girl said. "Even the finest filigree crystal, just as long as it's something inorganic. So that wasn't what smashed Dan's watch."

I shook my head. "It could have happened when he fell. Or when he ...well, at the receiving end."

She shook her lovely head back at me and gave me her reasons. The Teleport transmitter had recorded the accident at 10:10. Synchronization of the two timepieces could be taken for granted, since both worked on standard-pulse waves. That left fourteen minutes unaccounted for. Fourteen minutes, as she put it, after Dan had supposedly been killed. And since teleportation takes place at the speed of light...

"What did they say at CSS?"

"The same thing you did. That it must have happened at one end or the other. But they couldn't explain the time lag. So they told me to go home and forget it."

Beauty and brains in one gorgeous package. What I'd been looking for all my life. And now I was licked either way. If she wasn't a widow, she'd have her Dan. And if she were, she'd never forgive me.

I PUT THE ring and the watch in my pocket and got up. "I'll do what I can, but I won't promise a thing. Let me contact you after this; don't come here again under any circumstance."

She turned toward the door without another word.

"One thing more, Lila. My business may be illegal—but so is hoarding these. The serial numbers can still be traced to you, so they represent protection to me as well as pay. So don't take it so hard—and don't forget it, either."

She nodded, but her opinion was still in her eyes. Nothing I could say would ever change it, so I went right on stuffing her precious pink stuff into my wallet. When the door finally closed, I went to my visor screen and flicked on the night light. At least I

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could have the sheer pleasure of watching her walk.

She reached the street, paused apparently to look for a cruising moto-cab. But instead, a long purple jet job mushed in suddenly. A tall, lean guy got out to help her in, and my first thought was that Lila had already found another shoulder to substitute for her husband's.

But then, as it blasted away again, I got a second impression. There was a second man inside the cab, with a neurolyzer across his lap. Which could mean almost anything.....

By the time I reached the street, of course, it was out of sight. There was only a white-uniformed Security patrolman, staring indignantly at the blast marks on the panel-light pavement. He looked even more shocked as he saw the gun in my hand, and started toward me.

I didn't give him a chance to ask his interminable questions; I secured Security with a good old-fashioned right to the jaw. Like most things these days, it must have been made of glastic.

YOU HAVE to begin somewhere. I began the next morning with the only thing I knew for sure. Someone naned Benjie Hepler was head of Experimental at Teleporto, Subs., and had been Dan Hardigan's boss.

Benjie turned out to a beady-eyed little number with a suspicious nature. He was suspicious of the jobcon card and he was suspicious of me.

"First time I've ever seen Job Control move that fast. I only filed yesterday afternoon—late."

I shrugged. "They said you needed a technician and sent me over. That's all I know."

He studied the card some more. The card itself was all right—I'd made it myself from a genuine blank. The punching I wasn't so sure of, since that had been strictly improvised. It probably said that I had completed the Advanced Motherhood course and was qualified as a wet-nurse. But then *he* wouldn't know that either until it had gone through the filing machine.

"You've had Teleport experience?" he asked finally.

I leaned over and snaked the card from his skinny hands. "Look, Mr. Hepler. I'm wasting good work credits standing here waiting for you to make up your mind. If you don't think Job-Con knows what it's doing, I'll be glad to go back and tell 'em so."

That did it. He took back the card, shoved it into one of the drops by his desk, and barked something into his intercom. It sounded like "Mumps."

Mumps was a genuine throwback. He undid all of Lila's evidence in favor of free marriage. His head was long and bald and pointed. His body was squat. His hands were as big as my feet, and his feet were something straight out of a Venusian swamp. To make the picture complete, he growled.

"Yeah, Boss?"

"This—" he pointed at me, "—is our replacement for Hardigan. We'll break him in on the warehouse job, and you stick with him until we're sure he won't cause any trouble."

Mumps nodded and motioned to me. At the door I turned and glanced back at Hepler. He was still looking at me, which made it even.

"Hardigan," he said, "made a mistake. It took us the rest of the day to clean up the receiver again, so I hope *you* won't make any mistakes."

Nice guy, Benjie. I wasn't so sure I'd been so smart after all, but there was nothing to do now but follow Mumps.

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THE JOB was simple: a test under actual operating conditions. Two Teleports had been set up in one of the government warehouses. A transmutor and a reintegrater, just like the ones you saw at the Science Exhibition last year. Except these were big jobs, a good twelve feet across!

A mobile conveyor fed a steady stream of boxes into the big maw of the transmutor. Another one helped itself to the long crates pouring out of the receiver. These crates were made of a strange woven metal and covered with foreign script. A couple of Custom officers were on hand, and what Mumps didn't tell me I could guess.

We were carrying on a double-ended operation: simultaneously unloading and reloading a big space freighter somewhere. Since the range was set at twelve miles, I guessed it as out at the free-trade port. The labels on the incoming crates looked like Jupe, too, but I couldn't get close enough to make sure. Mumps had led me straight to the transmutor.

All I had to do was watch the dials —and pray that there wouldn't be a breakdown. Mumps stood by and watched me closely. When I mentioned Hardigan, he told me gruffly to keep my mind on my work or I'd find myself in the same fix.

Finally, the noon signal came, courtesy of standard-pulse time, and we sat down to our crunchy Energo rations. After we had eaten, a good pinch of Copenhagen loosened my friend up a bit. He told me first that his name wasn't Mumps, but M-u-m-z-p-f. And that Hardigan had lost his life, not here at my machine, but out at the Free Port.

"We just got the end product," Mumps said ghoulishly, and proceeded to give me all the details except the ones I wanted.

"What was he doing out there? Fixing a machine?"

Mumps shook his ugly head, chomping his underslung jaw. "Them Jupes don't want none of us, no more'n we trust them. When a machine goes haywire, they just teleport it back here for us to fix. I wouldn't put it past them Dog-ears that they shoved the kid in themselves."

"But if they did, Security—"

"Security can go blow its tubes, as far as they're concerned. That there's free territory, and don't you forget it. Diplomatic im-mutiny, they call it, and particularly with things the way they are between us and Jupiter, nobody's gonna go messin' around just because a nosey kid got hurt."

He spat out a black stream and shook his head again and looked at me with an unmistakable warning in his yellow eyes. "Hardigan was a nosey kid and a damn fool, mister, and don't you forget that neither."

AND THAT was that. We went back to work, courtesy of standard-pulse time, and it was worse than monotonous now. I knew now that I wouldn't find the answer at this end —and yet I couldn't leave without attracting a lot of unwelcome attention. Mumps was still watching every move.

Just before quitting time two things happened to break the monotony. Mumps was called to the videophone at the other end of the shed. I watched him talking into it, wondering whether I should make a break for it. And right then was when my neglected compensator dial edged up into the red and blew its top.

The boxes jammed up on the track and one of them fell off. It split wide open and I found myself staring stupidly at the contents. Why were *we* shipping Jupe fireware back to Jupiter?

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I had my first hunch then, but I didn't have time to think on it. Mumps came running with blood in his eye. The safety on the conveyor had finally shut it off, but my Teleport was still screaming. Mumps whirled a dial on the control panel, and the machine calmed down.

"Sorry," I said. "But it's nearly quitting time, anyway."

"Quittin' time nothing! You're workin' overtime tonight, Mac. You're gonna get this machine back in running order, or I know the reason why."

I looked at the big Teleport in surprise. It was still humming away cheerfully, normally, even though nothing was going into it now. Then I got it. Mumps was still facing me belligerently, but he had one eye on the clock. Stalling...

"I quit," I said, and started past.

I didn't get very far. He grabbed me, just as the quitting signal sounded off. I broke loose, but he got in front of me again.

"Maybe this'll convince you!" I said, and swung one up from the floor. It connected, and Mumps blinked—but that was all. He backed away, his big shoulders in an ape-like crouch, and waited for me to close in again so he could grapple.

I stalled, hoping one of the other men would come over to break it up. But by this time they were all heading for the door. Nothing, not even a good fight, was going to hold them one minute after closing time. They probably didn't think it was going to be a good fight—and they were probably right.

I did my best, though. We worked at it for nearly ten minutes, all alone in the big empty shed. Left, right, left, right—and still Mumps circled around in his crouch, not even bothering to guard but just waiting patiently for his opening. It was like hitting a sack of cement, but even so I think I might have worn him down if I hadn't tripped over the spilled box on the floor.

He was on me like a flash. I knew now it was for keeps, and I tried to get my gun out, but he already had me in his bone-crusher grip. My ribs creaked and my wind left in one grunt. Then he lifted me, hurled me away.

Dazed as I was, I still heard the hungry purr of the Teleport as I slammed into its empty, waiting mouth.

I FELT like an egg after it has gone through an electric fan. I knew I had died—so I couldn't see what all the argument was about.

"L'me finish him, Boss."

"Not now. We've got to get cleared out of here."

"Aw—I got it coming to me, Boss."

"No! Get busy on those boxes, like I told you."

I opened my eyes cautiously and saw the gleaming base of the Teleport machine. And scrawny little Benjie Hepler, a short distance away, directing two men who were working on the crates. One of them was tall and lean; the other one had had a neurolyzer in his lap the last time I saw him.

I turned over a little more then, and saw another old friend. He was looking down on me sourly. I closed my eyes hastily again—but not hastily enough.

"He's comin' out of it, Boss. He's gonna be in the way."

"All right! Toss him in with the others."

Mumps grabbed my collar with a choke-hold and pulled me blinking to my feet. There were the two big Teleports, all right, and a lot of boxes and

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crates. But we were no longer in the warehouse.

This seemed to be some sort of an underground dungeon, dim and damp and musty. There was a peculiar, alien rankness in the chill air—and I saw the reason as Mumps shoved me toward the exit. A huddled bunch of Dog-ears; twenty or more little Jupes gathered in the far corner, blinking their malevolent, protruding eyes!

It was enough to give Immigration the permanent flitters, but I had a few of my own to worry about. Mumps was dragging me along a narrow corridor, and being awfully careless about bumping my head against the baffles which extended out from the concrete walls. Finally he paused before a heavy metal door and held me up close to his ugly, blurred face.

"I warned ya, didn't I? But no—ya hadda get tough."

He raised his free hand. I tried to pull away, but it was just too much effort. The hand swung down—and then I was all mixed up with those fan blades again.

THIS TIME I *knew* I had made Heaven. My head was resting on a warm, soft cloud. The air was heavy with perfume, and an angel was stroking my aching skull.
was in her lap. I sat up and tried to
The angel was Lila, and my head put it back where it belonged—on my own shoulders.

We were not alone. The third member of our party was surveying me without enthusiasm or even sympathy. "A lot of help *you* are, Nox. At least Lila might have stayed out of it, if she hadn't gone to you."

"Dan, that's not fair!" She turned back to me. "They must have been following me. It happened last night, right after I left your apartment."

I nodded—and winced. The kid was slumped on the floor beyond Lila. A good-looking boy about twenty-two; tall, blond, with that lean, intellectual face that meant pure-line.

I would have picked him for Lila's Dan if she hadn't already tagged him. He was morosely nursing his left hand: the little finger was a bloody pulp. They must have used a hammer to get his ring past the knuckle-joint. Amputation would have been kinder.

I said, "Let's have it, Dan. Right from the beginning."

"What difference does it make now?"

"Snap out of it, chum! At least we can know what we're up against. I can guess most of it. What I can't guess maybe you can tell me."

He shrugged and told me, while Lila caressed him with tender eyes. He'd worked for Teleporto for three months, long enough to become suspicious of Benjie Hepler and the whole set-up.

"You mean this business—smuggling in Jupes?"

He shook his head. "Not at first. But I did know we were secretly working on human teleportation. My own assignments, the experiments I helped Hepler with, could only add up to that. Then I began to wonder why Hepler was so interested in a routine opration like this one. Yesterday morning I went out to the Free Port, started nosing around the Jupe freighter we were supposed to be unloading."

HE PAUSED and shrugged again. "A couple of Dog-ears sneaked up behind me while I was looking at the transmitter aboard their ship, and you know the rest. I ended up here, just like the Jupes they're bringing in. It's a neat system. Those long, basket-like crates leave the freighter with a

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Dog-ear inside. But they're intercepted here instead of going straight through to the warehouse."

I nodded. "The boxes going out of the warehouse also end up here. The stuff inside them is re-loaded into the empty Jupe crates. Then the crates are sent on to the warehouse and no one's the wiser. Only two catches. One is the time lag, which ordinarily would never be noticed. The other is that the *export* boxes have to be loaded with *import* stuff. That's when I first began to smell a Jupe in the stockpile—when I dropped one accidentally."

Dan and I nodded at each other, pleased with our own cleverness. Lila said fervently, "You see, Mr. Nox? I just knew that body couldn't have been Dan's!"

"Yeah. What about that?"

Dan looked at his mangled finger. "I knew I was in trouble even before the field hit me. When I came out at this end, there was only one of the gang near me, and he was even more surprised than I was. I jumped him and tried to get away, but the others finally trapped me in one of these blind corridors.

"They were all for killing me and sending me on through to the factory, since they knew I had checked in through the gate at Free Port, and my disappearance would have to be explained some way. But Benjie Hepler gave orders otherwise, apparently, when they called him.

"You see, I'd knocked out the first guy, and in the excitement they'd let him lay right where he landed. Right under the receiver. And those heavy boxes had piled up on top of him. Hepler must have ordered them to plant my identification and send *him* through, instead."

"Yes, but...that...that body I saw..." Lila shuddered and bit her lip.

Dan grinned at her humorlessly. "That's easy, honey. All you have to do is set the transmitter a bit off-range. A little out of focus, you might say."

I GOT UP and started pacing. It was better than just sitting and holding my head. The walls were solid, ancient concrete. The door was solid, stainless steel. The only opening in the entire room was an air vent—about twelve feet up and twelve inches across.

Dan said, "It's no use, Nox. This must be one of those old bomb-shelters. We're probably fifty feet underground."

I sat down again. "What's the gag? What're they saving us for? It means a one-way ticket out to the Big Rock, anyway, if they get caught. So what have they got to lose?"

Dan shook his head. "I can't figure it either. What's Benjie Hepler messing around with Jupes for in the first place?"

"Money?"

"He's got a Class A Executive rating, no family, and everything he needs. All he really cares about is teleportation; in fact, he's practically psycho—"

Dan stopped suddenly, gulping that last down, and glanced at Lila. I could guess what happy thought had just occurred to him, but there wasn't time to pursue it now. My ears had caught a grating sound. Someone on the other side of the door was working open the bolt!

I quickly sprawled out flat on my face again. Just inside the door, and just as Mumps must have left me. There was only time for a glance at Dan to see that he understood, and then I closed my eyes.

The door was already creaking

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open on corroded hinges as it slowly swung inward beyond my feet.

IT WOULDN'T have worked with anyone but Mumps. I was hoping it would be Mumps, and I knew it was when I felt the size of the foot that thudded into my ribs.

"Come on, chump. On your feet."

The boot landed again, but I remained limp and apparently unconscious. He cursed and leaned over to grab my arm—and Dan must have hit him in the same instant. Hit him hard, too, because I heard the painful thud as they both crashed into the wall.

By the time I could get to my feet, Mumps was already scrambling up. The kid was still slumped against the wall, groggy, and I couldn't expect any more help from him. Lila made a desperate grab for Mumps' gun, but he sent her sprawling with one savage swing of his arm.

Nevertheless, it had given me the second I needed. I sailed in with both fists flying, and then brought my knee up where it would do the most good. Mumps was rugged, but no superman. He doubled over. I straightened him up again with a solid right and then went after that gun arm.

The wrist gave with a nasty crunch. The gun went clattering to the floor, and Mumps was finished. In fact, as I backed away something else hit him. Something that straightened him up again in a last convulsive reflex. He was dead before he hit the floor.

I turned. Lila had the gun—my gun—clutched in both hands. She stared at her crumpled victim in shocked horror, almost surprise. Then the gun slid limply from her fingers. I was a sucker. I grabbed for her instead of the fallen gun.

I saw Benjie Hepler then. I saw the bell-mouthed neurolyzer in his hand. But it was too late. The paralyzing rays seared over us, froze us where we stood.

IT WAS only a light charge, or it would have blacked us out completely. Only our lower motor endings had been blocked. But that was scant comfort. No comfort at all, when I could only stand, rigid and helpless, with my gun lying at my feet. Out of the corner of my eye I could see that Dan had been hit too, even as he was pulling himself back to his feet. He was crouched now like a jet-jockey hero, but he was just as helpless as we were.

The look on Benjie Hepler's thin face could only be described as sad. He stammered almost tearfully, "I'm sorry, I really am. But I've had my orders now, and I can't do anything else. This is too big, too important, to take-any-chances——"

Fifteen minutes, I was thinking. Twenty at the most. A weak dose like this would begin to wear off by then. If we can only stall him. . .

"*You're* sorry!" I said, and was surprised to hear it come out in words. It was like finding you can still move your jaw after a bad case of space-freeze.

Dan croaked from my left: "*Why,* Benjie? *Why?*"

Lila said bitterly, "Why bother, Dan? He's a complete psychopath, can't you see that?"

A flush came into Hepler's pale, nervous face. "You don't understand, my dear. None of you do. Do you think I *want* to lose the most promising assistant I've had in years? Even Mr. Nox here—I've secretly admired his courage even when I've deplored his antisocial exploits."

He smiled at me wistfully and then went on: "I guess I do owe you an explanation, at that. You should at

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least have the satisfaction of knowing why this is necessary, and *I* wouldn't want you to go on thinking I was no better than that."

He dismissed Mumps' remains with a nod, and continued: "You know now, of course, that we have perfected organic teleportation, at least for short distances. What you don't know is that this whole work has been a top-secret government project. In fact, only two government officials, besides me, have known about it. The secrecy was necessary because of strong opinion, both public and official, against further experimentation.

"My research men have worked on only small, separate units of the whole; and Dan has been the only one smart enough to suspect the truth."

"So you're going to kill him for it!" interrupted Lila.

Hepler shook his head sadly. "I've tried, I've done all I can. I thought there might be a chance by pleading that he was indispensable. But when you started raising a fuss and went to Mr. Nox here... Well, there were just too many involved and the order came from the very top."

He paused and quoted the old gag, "Better one should die unjustly, than the State should die for one."

"The State!" I snorted. "You're trying to tell us the State is paying off these thugs, running Jupe inside its own borders!"

"The thugs, as you call them, are necessary. They actually believe they are engaged in a smuggling enterprise, so that insures their secrecy. As for the Jupes...well, we had to have some form of anthropoid life for our experiments. The Jupes were only too willing to make a 'smuggling' deal. They think they're landing a sizable fifth column...."

He paused again and shrugged. "We managed to lose quite a few of them at first. The ones that did come through have been promptly picked up by Intelligence. We see that they are, and Intelligence has gotten hold of some key agents that way. Also, we're letting the Jupes sneak back a Teleport machine now and then, by 'forgetting' the ones aboard their ships. When war comes, *if* it comes, the Jupes are going to wake up and find that *they're* the ones with the fifth column inside their borders."

HE LOOKED at us anxiously as if expecting applause. But I couldn't see it that way, even if I had been able to raise my hands. "The hell with the Jupes!" I said. "What about us?"

Benjie said apologetically, "It'll be quite painless, maybe even pleasant." Then he turned his head and called down the corridor. "Turk—Slim! Give me a hand here!"

I tried to move just the smallest muscle in my arm. I willed, and strained, until I thought I would bust wide open. But I might as well have been amputated from the neck down.

Benjie smiled at Dan fondly as he waited for his strong-arm boys. "In a way I almost envy you, my boy. It may be quite an experience. I've turned the range mark all the way up to infinity."

I caught Dan's gasp, even if I couldn't turn enough to see his face. "What does that mean? We all get blown to atoms?"

Dan answered slowly, "Not exactly." He didn't sound very cheerful about it.

Hepler said helpfully, "Think of it more in terms of light projection, Mr. Nox. You'll still be you, but you'll lose definition, so to speak."

If there was anything I didn't want

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to lose, it was my "definition". I told Hepler so in a few choice phrases, but he was still looking at the cheerful side of it.

"Really, it won't be so bad. My orders were simply to dispose of you, but I'm giving you this great chance. Teleportation is improving rapidly, Mr. Nox, and who knows? Maybe some day, somewhere, somebody will develop a receiver with an infinite range and happen to tune in on you."

He turned impatiently, wondering what was holding up his helpers. I saw the sudden look of fright in his face, I saw him desperately try to bring the neurolyzer around to bear. The next instant he was pulled out of sight in the corridor, going down under a whole swarm of Jupes!

And we still stood there helpless. Listening to the excited, shrill yapping of the Dog-ears, unable to move. For a moment there was bedlam, and then apparently Hepler got away. The Jupe pack faded away down the corridor—and I took a deep breath and found I could move. But my first move was to fall flat on my face as the muscles released their tension. A second later Lila also collapsed, and then Dan.

ENDLESS minutes passed as we lay there, coaxing the strength back into our throbbing limbs. The shrill cries from the main chamber told us that Hepler and his men were making a fight of it—even though Hepler's neurolyzer still lay where it had been torn from his grasp in the doorway.

I managed finally to crawl over to my own gun. A moment later I could weave to my feet. Dan was right behind, helping Lila up first and then gathering up the neurolyzer. Still shaky, I held them back then, letting them get their sea-legs once more while I surveyed the corridor.

On my left the passageway wound up in a dead end. There was only one way out—through the scene of battle itself. I glanced back at Dan and Lila. "Better that we jump them from behind than wait here in this trap?"

Their faces told me they were with me. We stole down the corridor, and again I motioned them back while I cautiously stuck my head around the corner.

It was a scene that was going to give me nightmares for many a night. The room was swarming with Jupes, and from the big Teleport receiver in the far corner more of them poured forth endlessly, row on row in their dun-colored uniforms like a weird military maneuver!

Hepler and his two friends were barricaded, or rather trapped, behind a pile of boxes on the other side. They had one neurolyzer—between them, but the charge was wearing low. It only staggered the oncoming Dog-ears, instead of dropping them in their tracks. Even as I watched, the first wave scrambled up over the barricade. The next instant Hepler's two remaining cohorts were dragged forth and literally torn to pieces. Benjie himself managed once more to scoot free like a scared rabbit—and I didn't hesitate any longer.

I rushed headlong into the mad mob, with Dan right on my heels. My blaster kicked again and again in my hand; the neurolyzer swept them back and dumped them in their tracks.

But it was as hopeless as fighting the ocean. Down they went but still they came, with their savage snarls and their poison-tipped *oolongs*. And more and more still poured forth from that humming, infernal Teleport receiver.

I had hoped at least to reach it

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and turn it off. But that was hopeless now. We had cut a path, and Lila was still with us, but we had gone as far as we could. There was only one way out, and that was the Teleport transmitter beside us.

Dan read my thought even as I glanced at it. He hurled his worn-out weapon away and fiddled frantically with the dials while I held off the Jupes. On the far side of the chamber, Benjie Hepler made a last desperate effort to join us. But they cut him off, drove him backward. He stumbled back against the opposite Teleport transmitter, looked around, and then hurled himself into it.

Lila had already gone and Dan was pulling my arm. I fired one last blast into the faces of the pressing Jupes and stepped backward. The last thing I saw was the dial on the transmitter which had swallowed up Benjie Hepler. It was the one he had set at infinity. . . .

THE SUDDEN, empty silence was like a blow. We were in the warehouse, dim and deserted now in the dusk of day. Blinking at each other incredulously, all of us whole and unharmed.

"Right on the nose," chortled Dan, and reached up to spin a control. "There. At least they won't get through *here*."

I looked down at the gun, still warm in my hand. I walked over to the transmitter where I had worked all day, only it seemed years ago now. The big Teleport was still purring, just as Mumps had left it when he tossed me in and followed me through.

Carefully I broke my blaster open, removed the tiny, lead-jacketed charge. A nail file from my pocket quickly made a mess of the delicate priming circuit inside the breach. Then I eased back the pellet and hurled the gun, still open, into the transmitter before me.

It was a trick the Jupes themselves had taught us when they messed with some blasters they'd captured at Todu. It had worked fine out there—and it worked now. Even before my arm could drop, there was a muffled, distant concussion, as if someone had dropped an X-bomb about twelve miles away.

I grinned at Dan and Lila. "Someone in Defense is going to have a hell of a job explaining *that* one."

Lila shuddered and clutched her man's arm. We walked outside into the cool night air, past a watchman who looked at us curiously. It was enough just to be still alive, to breathe clean air again. But after we had gone a block in silence, I stopped and broke into their rosy cloud.

"Where now, kids? The shooting's over, but the trouble just begins for you."

They stared at each other, and back at me.

"Dan hasn't even got an ID any more. He won't dare show his face at any Job Con window—and neither will you, Lila. You'll starve—or else you'll end up one one of those Intelligence tables under a brain machine."

I let that sink in, and then I said casually: "Lila told me you wanted to go to Mars. There's a tramp freighter in port right now, pushing off tomorrow morning. The captain's a friend of mine, name of Marco Koth. You tell him I sent you—and pray he likes your looks."

DAN DIDN'T need any more. He wrung my hand speechlessly, and ran across the street to hail a cab just swinging around the corner. Lila hung behind. She moved up close to

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me, the light from the pavement shining up in her face.

"Why, Mr. Nox? Why did you do it?"

I shrugged. "As my great-grandpappy used to say, just for the kicks."

"But..."

I dropped my eyes. She still had that gray *purch*-skin dangling from her shoulder. After all that, she must have clung to it as a mother will to a child.

"Money," I added. "You still owe me the rest of that eight hundred and seventy-six."

Something died in her eyes. She opened her purse, thrust the wad of bills at me, and turned away without another word.

I watched the cab pull away with their heads close together in the rear window. They didn't know what they were getting into, but they'd probably make it. And their kids wouldn't have teleportation or pre-balanced rations or radiant heating—but at least they'd have the freedom to make their own mistakes.

I was going to have a tough time, too. I was going to have one hell of a job persuading Marco Koth to take them for anything like eight hundred and seventy-six, or even a thousand straight....

Mars winked its red eye at me as I headed for a phone.

THE END

THE SATELLITE WRECKER

AFTER straightening his tie and nervously clearing his throat, Johnny Faulkner rapped twice on the shining aluminum door. He waited a moment and studied the inscription, "C. I. C.—Missile Command"—and wondered. To be dragged from a honeymoon by this urgent, top-priority courier message was bad enough, but why the Missile Command? He'd been among the first few pilots to handle the rocket interceptors, but he knew nothing about guided missiles. What the devil could the urgency be?

"Come in," a deep voice beyond the door said, and Johnny stepped into the office. It was a plain, simple room, at one end of which was gathered a cluster of officers. Johnny spotted General Wilson. He stepped up and saluted smartly. "Major Faulkner reporting as ordered, sir."

Wilson returned the salute perfunctorily. His face was lined and drawn, and it was apparent his mind wasn't on military protocol. The knot of officers had withdrawn a respectful distance.

Johnny flushed under the keen scrutiny of the General.

"Personnel says you're the best rocket interceptor pilot we've got," Wilson began abruptly. He waited a moment. "Are you?" he shot suddenly.

Johnny hesitated. "What...ah...I..."

"Are you?"

"Yes," Johnny said quickly, "I am."

"That's better," General Wilson said. He sat down. Johnny noticed how tired and worried he seemed. He reached into a box on his desk and handed Johnny a photograph. "Look at that, son," Wilson said gently, "and tell me what you see."

Johnny picked up the photograph and studied it. It was nothing more, apparently, than an ordinary astronomical photograph showing myriads of stars, glittering little pinpoints of light. But he noticed, about the center of the photograph, one dot circled with red ink.

"I don't get it, Sir," Johnny said, puzzled. "This is straight astronomy. What's it got to do with a rocket interceptor pilot?" he coninued boldly.

Wilson studied him keenly. "What is going to be said in this room won't go beyond it. Do you understand that?"

Johnny said slowly, "Yes, sir."

"That circled dot," Wilson went on, "is a Soviet satellite running in an elliptical orbit at fifteen thousand miles above the surface of this planet. Actually it's still in the process of construction and, when it's completed, this entire planet is going to be a Communist State! Only a lucky fluke brought it to our attention. Thank God for Palomar Observatory!" he added feelingly.

Johnny's face was white as he surveyed the grim-faced officers standing silently around him. He said nothing.

"And that's where you come in. I'm sorry that there's no time, but from this minute on the wraps are on. It's strict secrecy and I can't allow you to talk to anyone.

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I'm sorry about your wife but we'll give her some cock-and-bull story—for the moment." He stopped suddenly. "Wait a minute. Major Faulkner, I can order you into this, but that's senseless. We've got to have a man who wants to do what we're going to ask him. And I'll tell you there's a terrible risk involved for the man who takes it. I'm asking you, Major Faulkner, will you destroy the artificial satellite?"

"I'll try, Sir, but how?" Johnny felt a cold numbness in his mind. What was he saying? What would he tell Lorraine?

General Wilson reached across the desk and shook Johnny's hand. "I knew that you would," he said, a strained smile lighting his face briefly, "but if you hadn't, I'm afraid we'd have put the screws to you. You see, Faulkner, this thing has to be destroyed—if we want to live." He turned to an aide. "You know the procedure. Ship Major Faulkner to White Sands right away and tell them to get ready. I'm flying out later...."

A FANTASTIC VIGNETTE BY Charles Recour

The next two days were a living nightmare. He finally persuaded Wilson to let him assure Lorraine that he was all right. But that was the only concession. From the moment they took him into the huge hangar and displayed the rocket, he went through things in a kind of shock. Fast and furiously he was coursed through on control. The rocket was a miracle of improvisation. Eventually it would have come, but time had forced its construction in a hurry. It was as different from a rocket interceptor plane as night from day, but there were no pure rocket pilots and Johnny would be the first one. Therefore it was up to him to learn. He learned.

Every minute that delayed the departure of the *Hope* was a minute lost. The Soviets, it was known, were completing the satellite at a furious rate and their two shuttle rockets were in constant use. There was an ominous calm in diplomatic matters—calm until the Soviets should release their ace card. With an artificial satellite and a few atomic bombs the world was theirs!

This thought drove the technicians—and Johnny, superbly trained, but with no time for trial flight—at a furious pace. L-hour came and went. To Johnny it was an instant, and it wasn't until he realized that the surging acceleration had decreased to one G that he was space-borne. The enormity of the thought that he was the first man—American—in space didn't even occur to him. He had one thing to do and one thing only. The beauty and awesomeness of the flight were like thoughts in somebody else's mind. Only one clear, crystalline idea obsessed him. He had to destroy the satellite—even return seemed hazy.

Johnny sat in the bucket seat and surveyed the pin-studded blackness before him, one eye through the port, the other on the 'scope. Radar would locate the satellite and servos would guide him to it, but the planting of the bombs into it would be strictly a human and personal matter.

At plus-seven hours he got the first pulse. He was on strict radio silence, so as not to give the Soviets warning, and he was praying that they'd have no radar detectors, reasonable prayer, since the Soviets relied on surprise and secrecy for that daring plan.

He took over control. His plan was simple and he put it into execution. The 'scope showed only two thousand miles to go. Keeping the pip centered, he played with finger studs, the *Hope* moving to rendezvous with the satellite.

The technicians had built well, if simply, and the nose of the *Hope* was studded with twelve vicious gleaming cylinders, rockets laden with two hundred pounds of RDX, one of which was enough to shatter the flimsy structure of a satellite or space ship to nothingness if its proximity fuse were triggered within fifty feet.

At last the satellite came into visual observation, a mere thirty miles. With nose jets, Johnny had killed his velocity until he was approaching the satellite at a mere five miles a minute, slowly enough for him to make sure of the kill. He could observe the satellite clearly now, and with each minute it grew. From one side of the wafer-like cylinder protruded a cylindrical shape and Johnny knew this was a supply rocket.

At five miles Johnny knew he'd been detected. The powerful optical 'scopes showed that, but there was simply nothing the Soviets could do now. Softly saying "Lorraine, Lorraine", over and over again, senselessly, Johnny started his firing run. The rockets went, one, two, three...a dozen.

Nothing happened for a while. Then suddenly, for no apparent reason, there was a flare, and the satellite seemed to explode, pieces flying in all directions. The Soviet rocket disintegrated as it took three projectiles amidships. It was over that simply and quickly.

Johnny didn't think about the men.... it's not good to. He broke radio silence. The danger was over. "Nailed satellite and rocket...scratched them both...shall I await second supply rocket and destroy it...?"

"...Return at once...congratulations... second rocket crashed on take-off with bombs...peace assured...wife informed... Wilson, C. I. C. *Rockets*, signing off. Good luck, Johnny...."

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ASK A FOOLISH QUESTION

By Milton Lesser

It was a matter of micro-seconds before the entire ship was aflame. By accident?

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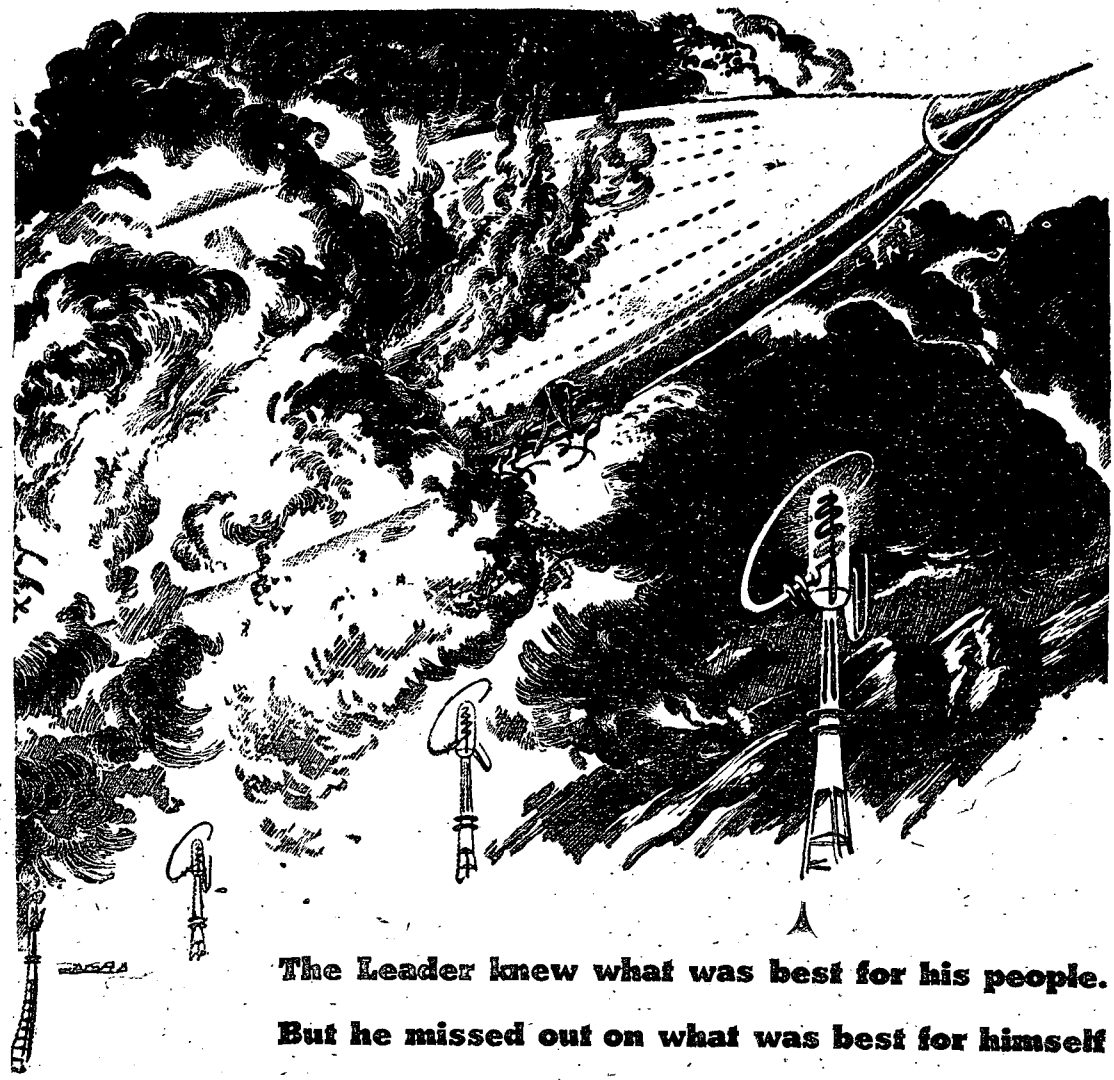

The Leader knew what was best for his people.

But he missed out on what was best for himself

HE WAS going to die.

The fear had washed over him hours before. He wondered if it always worked that way, in stages. At first he thought he'd know nothing but fear—wild, unreasoning fear, until the end came. It had ebbed, though. And now, surprisingly, he could smile at the insipid faces of passersby in the best Government-prescribed fashion.

"Greetings, Citizen!"

"Fine weather, Citizen!"

Why don't you drop dead, Citizen....

The second stage was curiosity. He was going to die. Obviously. The Government said so. And what they said was always so. It was certainly nice of them to warn him; they didn't warn everyone.

You are going to die (the Govern-

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ment man had told him, cheerfully, almost).

We all die.

But you are going to die next week. Monday, fifteen hours.

You're from the Department?

Yes, the Department.

How?

You'll find out. Against the Code to tell you in advance.

I don't want to die.

You'll die.

Must I?

Not in our hands. We merely predict, but we don't make mistakes. Monday, fifteen hours. You'll die.

Now, he wondered what death was like. Not the act of death, but after. Sleep? Hell? Heaven? None of them? Begin again, maybe. Some place else, someone else, a bawling infant once more, with a whole life of sameness ahead of him. It is, he thought, five days to Monday. Shine those gates, St. Peter. Rah. Here comes Jones. If there were a heaven—which he doubted, as much because the Government never mentioned it as for any other reason—then it would be all or nothing. It had to be all or nothing. Either everyone would go there or no one would, for everyone had been moulded in sameness.

Almost everyone.

HIS NAME was Gregory Jones. Gregory for his grandfather who had passed the tests and gone to space the year he was born. His mother had given him the name for luck. But he'd failed the tests so far, which wasn't unusual. He had an oval face with close-set eyes and sparse, mousey hair. He was medium height, a little on the stocky side, with sensuous lips. That's why he'd failed for space.

Over-all emotional attitude: too sensual. Tough luck, Jones. Try again next year. (Snicker—it's hopeless, old man, can't you see that it is?)

He was thirty-one years old and foreman of an assembly gang in one of the factories. After five years, he still did not know what they assembled—merely a squat black box with a lot of intricate stuff inside. You used it on spaceships, or maybe on the Utopia-colonies, wherever they were. Some said Mars, others argued for Venus. Once, a woman had gone around yelling Alpha Centauri and the Government agent had asked her if she'd ever seen Alpha Centauri. Why, no, I read you can only see it far south of here. Then shut your mouth, stupid. If you can't see it, how do you know it exists?

Which, Gregory Jones thought, was kind of foolish, especially since the Government asked you to accept a lot of things you couldn't see. Funniest part of it was, the woman passed her tests that year and spaced out to the Utopia colonies. Alpha Centauri? Now she knew, at any rate.

One, two, three, four, five. Five days to Monday. Quite logically, the third stage was anger. It boiled over, overflowing his curiosity at once, drowning everything else. An unfamiliar redness flooded his face, all the way to the roots of his sparse hair. Something constricted his throat and he almost choked. He reached a pudgy, thick-fingered hand into his pocket, found the crumpled pack of cigs, cursed when he realized it was empty. He balled it up and threw it toward the curb, savagely. The Government could predict such things as death when it wanted to, but it couldn't keep you supplied with cigs. Excreta on the Government.

"HAVE ONE of mine, Citizen Gregory."

"Eh? Thank you." He took the cig,

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lighted it, realized as he always did that it was at once sour and flat, harsh and bitter. It was nice, however, to roll the smoke in your mouth, provided you could forget the taste.

"I was on my way to visit you, Citizen Diane," he lied.

"Really?"

"Of course." It was an opportunity to forget his troubles, at least for the evening. Only, she'd like it better if the meeting had been more than an accident.

They stood on a street corner, the long rows of barracks effectively blocking the wind which moaned in from the sea this time of year. Twilight had come and gone, and now lights began to wink on in the little oval barracks windows. Gregory realized, with something of a start, that he had indeed come to within a street of where Diane lived.

"Oh, I'm glad you came, Gregory! Yes, oh yes. I'm ready for the tests this year, I'm more ready than I've ever been before."

Always it was the same. She'd said that every year that he could remember, and probably she'd go right on saying it until she became sixty, and hence ineligible for the tests. He generally thought it was funny, but he never laughed. Now he saw nothing funny in it; nothing could hold any emotional tone except his own predicament, and that wasn't funny. And so he chuckled softly there in the gathering darkness.

"What's the matter? You're laughing at me! I mean it, Gregory. This time I mean it. I can pass the tests and go out to the Utopia colonies. If you think that's funny, after all the years we've planned together..."

Instantly, he regretted it. Yes, they had planned for Utopia together although, actually, Diane had done all the planning. He'd merely nodded at the proper times, let her cry on his shoulder, also at the proper times, buoyed her up when she needed it, comforted her, studied with her, cheered her, made love to her.

She was good for that, and so he'd grabbed the opportunity at once. The Government frowned on it, for it was joy but not Government joy. Still, the Government had not yet become ubiquitous, and there were places out in the country where, if you knew the right people—

"I laughed because it's too late for me," Gregory said.

"What do you mean, too late?"

HE TOLD her about Monday, fifteen hours. He related it drily, as if it weren't happening to him at all. That was what she'd expect. Her hero. Stalwart, Rock-of-Gibralter Gregory. And because he told it that way, her sympathy would be all the greater and he'd profit at least by last-minute physical gratification, since he could not profit in any other way.

"It isn't fair." Diane sniffed. Good.

"Don't say that. It's not a question of fairness. Even the Government, it isn't the Government's fault. They merely predict, with a hundred per cent accuracy when they decide to do it at all."

"How do they predict?"

"I don't know. Only it never misses. Ordinarily, it would be a question of what you don't know not hurting you. For some reason, Government's seen fit to inform me in advance. Five days."

"Gregory."

"Please. No tears. No pity. I don't need that." For ever and ever, it seemed, he'd played this role with Diane. In his ears, the words he spoke sounded almost ludicrous. Melodramatic, certainly. Well, he'd carry

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it all the way. Let her search her own soul and find something lacking. "No recriminations, either."

"But—but there were so many times, so *many* times, when we let the opportunity slip through our fingers. Now you have five days. I'll be going to space, Gregory. I know I will. But I'll be going without you, all alone, and space won't be what it could have—"

"Enough. I have five days. I want them to be five days of life." How ridiculous could he get, and still have her believe? Anyway, it did not matter, not really. He'd played the role for so long that now he was not altogether sure that he wanted what she could give him. Perhaps the words formed in his larynx from force of habit. Definitely, they didn't stir him. Had he not met Diane here on the street, it never would have occurred to him to seek her out in the brief time that remained. Habit. He could call it nothing else. And—

THE LOGICAL conclusion staggered him.

How long had this been going on? Was he the only one? No, not even in his own experience, for Diane was a creature of habit, too. And Dane Kibberish, sweating, hard-working, moon-faced Dane Kibberish—he was a living, breathing pro-Government habit. Did the Government, then, encourage habit? Suddenly, it seemed so. More than that. Government encouraged habit of any kind! Pro-Government, like Kibberish, that was fine, but Gregory had the feeling they'd accept it either way. Why, they'd politely turn their backs on clandestine meetings, as they'd done for years in his own particular case. He found himself wondering if a scanner had followed him that day near Three Forks, where he'd met Diane behind the weathered old red barn. She'd brought the books and they began to study, but that was her idea, not his, and it didn't last long.

Had someone watched, and laughed—and approved? It was a hell of a time for his mind to insist on logic, yet that was the way it had always worked. First, the Government kept everyone busy but maintained a low standard of living. Naturally. The fruits of ninety per cent of all labor went for two things: either Government itself, or the Utopia colonies. You objected to the former, but it was a necessary evil, like death. You encouraged the latter, for you hoped that yourself, or your children...

Second, it seemed that Government could predict death at any time, but didn't want to. Result: an occasional prediction, as in his own case, sufficient to keep the people aware of some mighty potent power but not enough to create a neurotic, scared-to-look-in-the-mailbox frenzy.

And third, Government fostered habit. Habit inclined the Citizenry toward laziness, bad think-habits, indifference to hardship (unless the hardship broke the habit-pattern which, probably, it rarely did), lack of self-discipline and, finally, a dependence on Government, since most of the habits were in the nature of Government orders, although the Citizenry failed to see that.

"Well," said Gregory. "Well, well, well." His abrupt realization, of course, had come too late to do him any good. It did, however, bring a certain amount of satisfaction.

"We can go to the country," Diane told him. "For the whole five days, if you like." Then she brightened. "Say, could that make any difference? I mean, maybe it would alter the pattern or something—"

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"No. The pattern's already set. Since it never misses, I'm a dead man."

"Don't say that!"

"I'm a corpse. You're talking to a corpse."

"Don't."

"All right, for you I'll stop. But it's the way I think."

"Don't. We have so little time. I'll take my books out into the country, of course, but I'll only read them in the mornings. Almost, it will be like we're married."

It wasn't the marrying year. Also, Gregory wasn't the marrying kind, but he failed to say that. She'd have learned in time, had life run its normal course. Now she'd never know.

"I'll call you in the morning," Gregory said.

"The morning? Not now?"

All at once, desire had left him. Habit? He'd broken that habit at least, although the way he'd always felt, it should have been the last one to go. "In the morning," he said. "Rest period."

Five days. He had an awful lot to learn in five days, and he wouldn't miss out on the opportunity.

Later, he ate his stew at the barracks canteen, mouthing quickly the thick soup with its ugly splotches of pink meat. Dane Kibberish sat down near him, speaking endlessly about how his two children would be right for the Utopia colonies. He had an ugly little son, as Gregory remembered, aged three, and a buck-toothed, moronic daughter twice that age.

Gregory did not think of death at all. Five days? Five days could be a lifetime, especially when there was so much to learn.

A NEW THOUGHT, an unbidden thought, entered his mind when he awoke. Why hadn't he bothered wondering *how* he would die? There was death and death. There was the kind that hurt, the kind that lingered, the kind that struck swiftly and without warning. Like Government agents were rumored to strike at night with the quick dark hand of death at subversives! Now, *there* was an odd comparison, Gregory thought as he got into his jumper, ran a comb through his sparse hair, stepped out into the hall, padded across it with his toothbrush to the community washroom.

Softly but volubly, Gregory cursed himself for a fool. Here he was, gargling with the salty, antiseptic mouthwash, preparing to go to-work—with but four days of life remaining. Did his work matter? Did he actually care about it? Certainly not. Habit again. Ironically, he wondered if some hardly guessed-at habit would cause his demise.

"Morning, Citizen!" Dane Kibberish called cheerfully, spitting mouthwash into the trough. It wasn't particularly warm, but sweat beaded Kibberish's forehead and cheeks, running down the moon-face and dripping off the tip of the incongruously long nose. He managed to work up a sweat and bring color to his cheeks, to pant from exertion and mop his brow in earnest, with every little action. At the factory, he merely fastened a clamp to each of the black boxes that rolled down the conveyor, but when the closing whistle blew his jumper would be ringing wet.

"You should see them," Kibberish said, and smiled inanely. "They'll be right for the Utopia colonies. Oh yes, I can see it. The girl is only six, but smart! And the boy—"

"I'm sure," Gregory said. Kibberish made him sick. Kibberish was so typical. It was the Kibberish-type that formed solid bedrock for the Govern-

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ment. Kibberish was a statistic.

"Walk with me to the canteen, Citizen Gregory?"

Gregory sneered. "Don't you read Govnews? A good Citizen like you?"

"Well, as a matter of fact, I didn't have a chance last night. Visiting night at the Under-ten barracks, you know. But I have a copy in my back pocket —ahh! Here we are. What's that got to do with walking down to the canteen?" Kibberish took the folded sheet from his pocket, spread it out over an unused wash basin.

SOMEHOW, Gregory was enjoying himself. "Page three," he said.

Kibberish read aloud, in a shocked voice. "It is the duty of the Department of Prognostication to announce that Citizen Jones-2013-G38 will perish on Monday, the sixth of the month, at fifteen hours precisely. A Section Foreman for several years, Jones has been a good, loyal Citizen. He is unsurvived by relatives."

For a time, Kibberish couldn't speak. He stood there, his tongue clucking foolishly. Then: "My word, Gregory. Oh, oh, oh! You seem so healthy. Oh, yes, you do. But the Department of Prognostication never makes mistakes—"

"It could be violence," Gregory suggested, fighting back a wild urge to laugh. "I could be as healthy as they come, right up to the last minute."

Kibberish bathed his face with a damp handkerchief which failed to sop up the sweat. "I'm sorry, Gregory. Truly sorry. On the other hand, it is nice of the Department to inform you and allow you to put your affairs in order. . . ." His voice trailed off lamely.

And that, Gregory knew, was what bothered him more than anything. People died every day, suddenly, unexpectedly. Theoretically, the Department of Prognostication could have warned them all, but didn't. Why? Why did it single out a certain few individuals for no apparent reason? If you were going to die—well, you were going to die, no two ways about that. But if the Department could somehow foresee it, then a logical assumption was—no, he'd gone over that ground before. Too many frightened people would result, for every visitor, every letter, every call might bring the announcement of doom. Then what remained? The Department liked to strut its stuff, that and nothing more. It was a question of tag, you're it, and Gregory had been tagged. It didn't matter, not really, for death came either way, at precisely the same time. Gregory knew in advance, that was the only significant difference.

"Well," said Gregory, "I guess you'll go on to the canteen yourself."

"Why? Aren't you coming?"

"No. I've decided to skip work today."

"You're not ill, are you? Government frowns on. . . ." the voice droned on and on. Kibberish had come down to familiar ground, and it seemed he'd forgotten the Govnews article. We've got to work, work, work. Doesn't Government say this world is a sort of teleology, anyway? Don't they tell you how each year the men and women fortunate enough to merit Utopia are drawn from it? What's the matter with employment, there's no absent-without-leave. There can't be. You shouldn't complain, though, Citizen Gregory. Sure, you work sixty-five hours a week, but doesn't that leave you plenty of time to read Govnews and Govbooks and hear Govsic? All right, if you're slothful, Government will push from below to keep you in line. But remember this: Utopia will always be pulling from above, skimming off the intellectual and emotion-

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al aristocracy for a new and better world. Earth's function is merely to keep that world supplied with everything a Utopia should have, so we've got to work and work and work! And blah, blah, blah. The fat lips blubbered Government dogma effortlessly.

"I'm not going," said Gregory, and went back to his cubicle. He remained in bed a full extra hour. He'd never recalled anyone doing that before, unless he were ill. Certainly, if they had, no one had ever told him.

THEN, WHEN it would be rest period at the factory, he went down the hall to one of the public vid-phones, inserted the correct coin (after waiting on line fifteen minutes) and dialed Diane's section of the factory. It always irked him to wait on line like that: it seemed that, all his life, he'd always been waiting on line for something. Well, Government Stat estimated there was one vid-phone for every five-hundred Citizens and, obviously, things had never been that good in pre-Government days. The standard of living was low, he supposed—but vaguely, for the words hardly had any meaning. Hadn't standards of living always been low? Government said so. All such things were relative, it said, but compared with life in the Utopia colonies, the standard was low. Not as low as it had been before Government, but low.

Besides, the standard was low to insure the highest possible standard in the Utopia colonies. And you couldn't argue with that.

Diane's pretty face frowned at him from the screen. It *was* a pretty face, he thought, although lines of age had already etched themselves there. Well, Diane was twenty-six and no youngster. Often, he wished he'd known her ten years before....

"Hello, Citizen Gregory."

"I said I'd call you this morning."

"I know what you said, but something's come up, and I'll be leaving work early today. Have the balance of the week off, too. Why don't you call me Sunday night. Then, well, we can get together once for old time's sake before..."

Sounds. The words ran together meaninglessly, a jumble of sounds. Could Diane have changed so overnight? No, completely unlikely. Unless—

"Tell me, Diane, has a test schedule been announced?" Government did things like that, allotting no special time each year for the tests. They came up suddenly, without warning, with no time for cramming, and those who passed spaced out to the Utopia colonies soon after that.

"No."

"No? Then what—"

"I didn't say one *wouldn't* be announced."

"Eh? How can anyone tell?"

"Oh, Gregory, I've met the most wonderful man! It happened last night, after you left. I thought it was you all over again in the darkness, because he's built just like you, almost. But the face is different. He's handsome, Gregory. Oh!—and all the things he knows. Can you imagine it, Gregory, years ago he passed the tests; he could be in the Utopia colonies now, but he decided to remain behind, and—"

"A likely story." Gregory was shocked to find he could feel jealousy four days before death.

Diane stuck her tongue out and made a loud noise with her mouth. "Don't believe me, see if I care. He's going to teach me, Gregory, so I can pass the tests. They're coming soon, he says, and this time I'll be ready."

He didn't remind her that she'd

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always been ready, three hundred and sixty-five days each year. He said, "Would it be possible for me to meet your friend?" The words surprised him. Why on Earth did he want to meet the man? Probably Diane was lying anyway. On the other hand, could he afford to take the chance? If the man were all that Diane said, if he could indeed forsee the coming of the tests, what other strange knowledge might he possess? Was it entirely within the realm of possibility that he'd also know something of the Department of Prognostication? "Yes," Gregory said, breathing harder now. "I'd like to meet your friend."

Diane was frowning again, but she told him, "Very well. My barracks, in one hour. We won't wait." Her image faded from the screen.

Gregory dressed silently, changing to his finest jumper, the one which he'd received two years ago and which had not faded much because he hardly ever used it. For the first time, it occurred to him that death might not be inevitable after all. And that made him sweat, like Dane Kibberish, almost. Strange. Fear had come once, only at the beginning and only for a brief moment, and then it had vanished. He'd managed to get by without fear after that, he supposed, because fear indicated anxiety—and if death were the only possibility, there was nothing to be anxious about! But now, now he felt a wild tightness in his chest and an inability to swallow although he wanted very much to swallow. He knew he'd be quite desperately afraid until the end came.

"CITIZEN GREGORY JONES, Citizen Alec Sampter." Diane's two hands clutched Citizen Sampter's elbow as she made the introductions. "Would you believe it?" Diane bubbled. "We met quite by accident. Oh, quite. I feel as if I've known Citizen Alec all my life."

There was an unfamiliar sheen to Citizen Alec's jumper, a gloss to the leather of his shoes. There was also something patronizing about his smile.

"To be sure," he said. He was built like Gregory, medium height, slightly stocky. But his face was gaunt, with the flattest, most expressionless eyes Gregory had ever seen. He had a little mole high up on his left cheek, out of which a tuft of hairs grew. His lips formed the merest slit across the bottom of his face, and when he spoke they hardly seemed to move.

Gregory wanted to say, "I thought you told me he was handsome." But the fear was still with him, lingering at the fringes of consciousness and if Citizen Alec could somehow—

"Diane tells me you can predict the tests," Gregory said.

"I never said that! Oh, I never said that. He's lying, Citizen Alec. I only said—"

"I don't predict them," Citizen Alec declared. "I simply know when they are coming. Tomorrow and Saturday."

"I thought only the Leader knew that."

"Consider." Citizen Alec smiled condescendingly. "How could the tests be distributed if only the Leader knew? There must be those who prepare the tests, those who print them, those who distribute. If a man fits any one of those categories, he knows."

"Could you tell me—" Gregory began.

But Diane interrupted him. "You said we could study together, Citizen Alec. And there is so little time."

"Yes," Gregory mused. "So little time. If you could answer some questions, Citizen Alec?" He had come here doubting. Still, it had been a straw to grasp. And now that he'd

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met Citizen Alec, he wasn't so sure. There seemed something about the man, something which made you think, without knowing why you thought it, that if anyone could help you, it was he.

"SUPPOSE I try to satisfy you both," said Citizen Alec. "You gather your books, Diane, and the three of us will drive out into the country."

"Drive?" said Gregory.

"Of course. In my car."

"You have a car?"

Citizen Alec showed them his thin-lipped smile. "If one knows of the tests, does it not follow that one has a car?"

Gregory had been in a car once, years ago. A mistake had been made, and Government agents took him in the car to the extermatorium until the error had been rectified. He had very nearly lost his life, and since that time he'd feared the big, noisy vehicles. Most of the Citizenry feared them for no reason at all unless, perhaps, Government made that same mistake with most of them. It crossed Gregory's mind, all at once, that this could be, for he knew many people who came that close to extermination themselves. Did Government, then, attempt to instill fear?

Diane returned to them with an armful of books and the three of them went out to the street. The car was parked around the corner.

Big, sleek, shiny, all of glass and gleaming metal, it awaited them. Gregory had to step down to get inside, but he forgot his fright when he found the seats were far softer than his bed at the barracks. He stared right back at all the Citizens who stood outside gawking at them, and he wondered idly if they thought he belonged.

Then, Citizen Alec started the purring motor, and they whisked away from the curb. Gregory's heart jumped up and began to jiggle his Adam's Apple.

THEY LEFT Diane pouting in a little wooded clearing with her books, promised to return within a few hours. Then, driving down the dusty road once more, Citizen Alec grinned. "I really must admit I don't know what sort of questions you have, or that I can answer them." The grin faded. Citizen Alec didn't grin much.

"You know of the tests," said Gregory. "I was wondering what else you might know."

"About what, Citizen?"

"About—about the Department of Prognostication!"

"First let me ask you a question, Citizen. Have they notified you?"

"Yes. Monday, fifteen hours." It had meant nothing when Gregory told Diane. It was an opportunity to get something from her, and so he'd told her. And Kibberish? He'd informed Kibberish to see the man squirm in an awkward position. But with Citizen Alec, somehow, it was different; with Citizen Alec the full horror of the situation enveloped him. "I'm going to die," he said, gagging on the words. "I'm going to die. To die!"

"Of that you can be certain," said Citizen Alec, coldly. "Did you drive out here to cry like that, or did you want to ask me questions?"

"Yes, of course. I want to ask you questions. Do I have to die? Do you know if I have to die?"

"If the Department says so, you'll die."

"And there's nothing I can do? Nothing?"

For some reason, Citizen Alec began to chuckle. It was laughter, at

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least it sounded like laughter. But it was entirely without mirth.

"What is funny, Citizen Alec?"

"I laugh. Must something be funny?"

"What is funny? I am going to die. Do you think that funny?" Gregory threatened him with a balled fist.

"No, that is not funny to you. It might be funny to other people."

"To no one. No one should laugh because I am going to die."

"There. I have stopped laughing. Does that make you feel better?"

"Why did you laugh?"

"I have stopped."

"But why did you laugh?"

"I think we had better return to Diane."

"There was a reason. I want to know the reason."

"Oh, really, Citizen Gregory! Had I known you were like this, I would not have suggested you join us."

"I have asked a simple question. Why did you laugh?"

"It is a foolish question. I laughed because I wanted to. Is there a law against laughing? Has the Leader said we cannot laugh?"

"I wouldn't know."

"He hasn't. And there, that's better, Citizen. Compose yourself. If you must know why I was laughing, it is because the Leader has such power. If he decides a man is to die—"

"Decides! I thought Prognostication merely finds out. Decides!"

"It is the same thing."

THEY WERE driving down a slight incline. On their right was the forest. On their left only a flimsy fence of wood lay between them and a steep precipice which fell off abruptly to the valley far below.

"It is not the same thing. Tell me, Citizen Alec: what would happen if a man knew he was going to die because the Department of Prognostication had so informed him—and then decided to die in advance?"

"An interesting question."

"Tell me. Would the man die anyway, assuming he had decided to die in advance, but really wasn't dead at all?"

"I do not understand."

"I am not altogether sure I do." The fear was beating at Gregory's temples, closing a dull curtain of red in front of his eyes. "Stop the car."

They lurched to a stop. Gregory made a mental note of which dial held the car that way on the incline, unmoving.

Gregory swung his right fist up and felt it smash painfully against Citizen Alec's jaw. *Why am I doing this,* he wondered. *Why?* It all seemed quite impossible. Two of Citizen Alec's teeth tumbled out with a lot of blood and fell in Gregory's lap. He whimpered and brushed them away with his left hand, hitting Alec again with his right fist because the man began to yell. After that, he did not yell. He just sat there, his head slumped down, his eyes shut. Blood trickled from the corners of his thin lips.

Gregory opened the door, stepped outside. He found Citizen Alec's registration card in back, with a picture. A good likeness. This he folded into his pocket, then stood there scowling. What now?

If a man died ahead of schedule, wouldn't that be the same thing? Certainly not. Prognostication only predicted, they didn't determine. But why had Citizen Alec been so obscure, so enigmatic? Had he known something that made him laugh like that? It was a foolish question, he'd said. Well then, what kind of an answer could he expect?

Still—

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Citizen Alec decided for him. Citizen Alec stirred groggily, whimpered, but not like Gregory had whimpered when the broken teeth fell in his lap. Citizen Alec rubbed his jaw and then slumped down again. But he was moaning.

Gregory reached in through the window, twisted the dial which held the vehicle unmoving on the hill. It began to roll forward, slowly. Sweating, Gregory trotted alongside it, cramping the wheel to the right.

He jumped back, watched the car gain momentum. It hit the flimsy wooden barrier about thirty yards from him and crashed over the edge of the cliff, making a loud noise. Several seconds later, there was another noise, louder this time, and fearfully, Gregory ran to the edge of the precipice and peered over it. Far below, the vehicle had struck some rocks. It was shattered and broken and flame began to lick greedily from some place underneath it.

Gregory chuckled drily, practising. It sounded almost like Citizen Alec.

THE SIGN said:

FLESHART! FLESH-A R T! FLESH ART!

Features remodeled artfully!

No charge if you aren't satisfied!

Then, in smaller printing:

Government sanction essential.

A bell tinkled as Gregory entered the shop. He wondered if Diane were still sitting in her ridiculous meadow. Perhaps she'd heard the crash. But no, they'd been too far away. Afterwards, Gregory had slunk to a town two miles down the road, had waited for the puffing, ancient steam-train, had boarded it, giving up a month's supply of travel-coupons. He'd sat in a corner of one of the coaches with his collar turned up and his head hunkered down, and no one had looked at him. He hoped the flames would obscure Citizen Alec's face entirely.

The proprietor of the Fleshart store had a halo of frizzly white hair, a short, blunt nose, a round black hole of a mouth through which he seemed to breathe instead of his nose, for it hung open, revealing half a dozen jagged, yellowed teeth, and the tongue trembled up and down with each rasping breath. He had but one eye, large and watery. The other eye-socket was stuffed with dirty cotton.

"Yes?" The word rasped out sibilantly with one of his labored exhalations.

"My face must be remade entirely," said Gregory. "And you must change my hair. All by nightfall."

"The hair is part of the face, Citizen. By nightfall, eh? Very expensive. Does it matter how I change it?"

"Yes. I want to assume a particular appearance, and it's got to be exact."

"Bad. More expense. You don't look like a Department man."

"I'm not."

"Then you'll not have the money. Good day, young man."

"Wait." Gregory moved into the interior of the shop without an invitation. "You don't make much money here, do you?"

"Enough to live. Just enough to live." The old man twisted idly at some loose cotton in his empty eye-socket. It almost made Gregory sick, but he pretended not to notice.

"A bargain. I'll admit it; I haven't the money now. But—"

"But me no buts. Out!"

"But if you do it and if the job is good I'll *look* like a Department man—and then I'll have money, more money than you ever saw. It's up to you, don't you see? A good job gets me what I want, and it gets you

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your money."

"Five thousand dollars."

"Five thousand dollars, I don't care. It's entirely up to you."

"I change noses, or cheek structure, or an occasional harelip," the old man mused. "Fifty dollars, a hundred. It's slow. A chance like this—h'mmm. All right, young man—for five thousand dollars."

"*If* your job lets me pass."

"It will. I assure you, it will."

TREMBLING, Gregory reached into his pocket for the registration card. "Here's the face," he said, handing the card to the old man.

"Citizen Alec Sampter—" the proprietor began to cackle.

"Forget it!" Gregory cried. "Forget that name."

"Yes, yes, of course. You are to be Alec Sampter." The old man studied the picture carefully. "It would have been far better in color," he mumbled, peering intently at the glossy print. He grunted something unintelligible, placed the picture on a counter, limped toward Gregory and pinched his thick cheeks. "We'll have to remove a lot of this. H'mmm. And the eyes won't be hard. The hair, so—and..."

The fingers which probed his face had a vaguely unwholesome odor. They were dirty, every skin-crack was lined with ancient black dirt. The nails were bitten off close, but the torn cuticles were swollen and dirty. Gregory flinched, fought down an impulse to gag.

"Yes, I think we can let you out of here tonight. You'll have to be careful, naturally. You'll be dizzy and your face will be tender. Vertigo is quite common so soon after. Very likely you'll vomit, and keep on vomiting until it feels your insides are coming out. Cigarette?"

"Please," Gregory croaked hoarsely. He hardly recognized the ancient word for cigs, but the smell of the man and the look of him and what he said had already brought a tight ball of nausea to Gregory's stomach. "Please, no. Can't you start at once?"

Shrugging, the one-eyed man palmed the picture with a greasy hand and motioned for Gregory to follow him past a heavy, filthy curtain.

As he followed his guide within the unknown interior of the shop, reaction hit Gregory with palpable force. I have killed a man, he thought, Killed him. Is there a law against it? I do not know, but never in my experience do I remember one Citizen killing another. He is dead, Citizen Alec Sampter is dead, and that at least is irrevocable. When, in a matter of hours, I shall take Citizen Alec's place, I will announce to the world that it was Citizen Gregory Jones who perished. Sad, for I liked my name. Gregory. Yes, Gregory, it has a certain ring to it.

So what? Unguessable so whats. Does it mean, then, that because I have terminated myself ahead of schedule (provided it works) I will not meet the end preordained for me? But how can that be? Prognostication merely predicts. Death itself brings the terms of demise, afterwards. No, that is wrong. All wrong. Death would bring the terms of demise whether or not Prognostication predicted. But why did they predict for me? Ah, why?

"Come, come, Citizen! This way. Yes, stretch yourself out there, and we will begin at once...."

Gregory felt the needle grating against bone before he tumbled headlong into a pit of blackness. His last thought was: Are those dirty hands going to touch *my* face?

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CACKLING obscenely, the one-eyed man held up a mirror. "It is done; it is truly a work of art."

Gregory blinked, stared at the mirror. After a time, he smiled foolishly. Citizen Alec Sampter leered back at him.

Gregory twitched his nose. Citizen Alec's nose twitched back at him. Gregory fingered the hair-tufted mole on his left cheek, ran his hands down the gaunt face, stared unblinking at the flat, expressionless eyes which looked back at him. When he spoke he observed that the lips which moved hardly moved at all; the small slit of a mouth simply pursed itself, and sounds issued forth.

"It is quite satisfactory," Gregory-Alec said.

"I know. I know! Ten thousand dollars is indeed a small price."

"Ten? We agreed upon five."

"Did we?" The horrible old man snickered. "I fail to remember."

"Yes, five."

"Well, it is now ten. After you assume your new identity, of course."

"Where is my registration card?" Gregory demanded dully. He needed Citizen Alec's address. Smiling, he took the card, for he realized he'd never looked at the address before this.

The address read: *Transient, City Hostel.*

"I will have ways of keeping track," the old man predicted. "Remember, ten thousand dollars, at your first opportunity."

"We don't even know if Citizen Alec had that much money!" Gregory cried, appalled by the thought of giving up all that money, if indeed it turned out he possessed it.

"H'mmm. You are right, Citizen. We will agree upon a percentage in advance. Fifty per cent of your total wealth in your new identity."

"Fifty per cent?"

"Fifty, yes. For a start."

Suddenly, it was clear. The old man could bleed all the red from his veins. Once the thing started, there would be no stopping it. Like a severed jugular vein—

The one-eyed man patted Gregory's cheek, and exquisite pain lanced deep within him through the nerve-endings. He screamed.

"It is not yet dry, Citizen Gregory. See? See? Somewhat pliable. Careful: for the next several hours, pressure or a sudden blow could distort your new face. Now, fifty per cent will be the outright payment for my art, and afterwards, we could arrange a small weekly—"

Red blobs of agony filled his head. Words. The Fleshart Proprietor was speaking. The same thing, it was the same as he had said before. A *leech, a leech, Citizen Gregory—I will be a leech....*

"...say, fifty dollars additional per week if your own income is in excess of one hundred..."

More red blobs.

"...or one hundred if it is in excess of two hundred..."

Icy needles jabbing into his burning brain. Why had the man touched his painful cheek?

"...or all excess if it is more than three hundred..."

Gregory's strong hands coiled around the old man's neck.

After he let the lifeless body fall from his grasp he ran, whimpering, into the night.

"SPIRITS," said Gregory.

The Citizen Bartender shrugged. "If you wish them, I will give you spirits. But you have had more than enough."

Gregory took the glass. The Citizen Bartender took his monthly spirits

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card, punched another hole in it. It was covered with holes.

Gregory lifted the glass to his thin slit of a mouth, drank. In the mirror behind the bar, Citizen Alec drank. Citizen Alec looked drunk, in his flat, expressionless eyes mostly. The Citizen Bartender wagged his head from side to side, sadly.

"I know," he said. "You have heard about the tests and you are despondent because you have not prepared."

"The tests? The tests?"

"Tomorrow and Sunday. Yes, the tests."

"More spirits." The small glass would not stand still on the surface of the bar.

"All the holes have now been punched in your spirits card."

"Don't you see, Citizen Fool? Although I have but one card, I am really two Citizens. You may punch all the holes again."

"Go home to your barracks."

"I am a transient."

"To the hostel, then."

"Citizen Fool."

"Stop banging on the bar."

"Citizen Fool!"

"You disturb my patrons."

Gregory slammed both hands down on the surface of the bar. "*Citizen Fool!*"

Something hit him. It made a dull sound, like *splat*. He knew it was the Citizen Bartender Fool who had struck him, full in the jaw, with a balled fist; but it was a while before the pain came. When it did, it was like nothing he had ever felt before. The pain started at his jaw and engulfed his face. He screamed and screamed and, clutching his hurt jaw, staggered outside and somehow managed to find the hostel down the street. The Citizen Room Clerk looked at him and laughed and Gregory did not ask why he laughed, but allowed him, instead, to lead the way to Citizen Alec's room.

He threw himself across the bed without removing his shoes, screaming and sobbing until he slept, for the hurt had become a terrible throbbing. Someone banged on the thin wall and told him to shut up.

THERE WAS no pain when he awoke, not even a hangover. It was as if, during the night while he slept his restless sleep, his mind had cornered his body and said, "We will have a lot of work to do together, now that the act is accomplished. We can neither of us falter and, therefore, you do not hurt."

He dressed methodically, first exploring Citizen Alec's closet and finding several outfits of lustrous, expensive raiment. Citizen Alec, then, had been a Department man and, briefly, it crossed Gregory's mind that he might not be able to fill the dead Citizen's position. Well, time enough to see about that later. Now it did not matter, not when Gregory himself might be dead on Monday. The thought of that, he realized, increased the flow from his adrenal glands and forced his heart to work faster, but aside from that it failed to disturb him.

Gregory rubbed his cheek, felt the thick stubble, chuckled when he found that Citizen Alec had a thick beard. Well, he'd shave it. He walked into the bathroom, found neither razor nor brush nor cream. But there was a bottle of some almost colorless liquid which bore the label: DON'T SHAVE! and under it, in smaller letters, *depilatory*. Gregory had heard about this liquid which negated the need for razor-blades and scraped faces, and he knew it had been reserved strictly for Department men.

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It went with Citizen Alec's good clothing and his car, too, and Gregory had a slight spasm of fear. Could he hope to fill the dead Citizen's position?

He unscrewed the bottle's cover, adjusted the swivel mirror and screamed. He clutched the sink for support, felt the small cubicle of a bathroom spinning wildly. He shut his eyes tight, then opened them again, staring at his new features in the mirror.

He had a lopsided face.

Did that explain the Citizen Room Clerk's laughter? It wasn't terribly lopsided, but the left side of the jaw was decidedly askew, slanting that side of the slit-mouth down perhaps ten or fifteen degrees, drawing the lower lip down and baring the teeth. Citizen Gregory-Alec had a perpetual leer. He composed himself, considered the defect with an objectivity that almost startled him. The Citizen Bartender was responsible, of course; his flailing fist had twisted the face before it had set properly.

FINE. OH, that was wonderful. He couldn't go back to the store for repairs: the Fleshart proprietor was dead. There, at least, he felt no remorse, for he knew it had been the only alternative. So he had a lopsided face. It was his, his face, and of necessity he'd live with it. Well, hadn't he been in an accident? One man perished when the car leaped the roadbarrier and tumbled over the cliff, and certainly another man would be lucky to escape with a dislocated jaw. Still, careful Government investigation might terminate his masquerade almost before it started. No, that didn't seem inevitable. He recalled that the Fleshart sign proclaimed the necessity for Government sanction, yet the ugly one-eyed man had never broached the question. Government was not and could not hope to be ubiquitous.

The lopsided face, Gregory decided, might be the least of his worries.

He used the depilatory, then went downstairs to a public vidphone. He got information, called the Department of Fatalities.

"I wish to report an accident," he said, as the face of a young woman appeared.

"Sub-division?"

"Eh? Oh, highway."

"One moment." The woman's voice faded and another one, perhaps ten years older and decidedly unpretty, took its place.

"Yes?"

"I wish to report a highway accident."

"Sixty miles north of the city? We already know."

"Oh."

"A sad thing. Citizen Alec Sampter was killed instantly, charred beyond recognition."

"NO!" Gregory hadn't meant to yell, but it came out that way. "That's all wrong, all wrong. Citizen Alec Sampter still lives. I am Citizen Sampter. Look at me. See?"

"The car was registered under the name of a Citizen Alec Sampter." There was a stubborn edge to the woman's voice, as if she couldn't defile her records with an erasure.

"You'd better check with Identification," Gregory suggested.

There was a pause, then something flared brightly in the vidiscreen. "I've taken your picture," the woman said. "We will call you in a moment."

Gregory watched the screen go dark, waited. Would someone notice the lopsided face?

The screen flared up again, and the woman was scowling. "You're Citizen Sampter, all right. But who died in the wreck?"

Gregory's tongue flicked out, licking his thin lips. "Citizen Gregory

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Jones," he said. "Jones-2013-G38."

"H'mm." The woman was busy checking a long list of names; Gregory could see her running a blunt-nailed index finger over it. "No one has reported Jones-2013-G38 missing."

ALMOST, Gregory said that was natural, because Jones lived alone, and no one would miss him, at least not for some time. But he caught himself in time, told the woman: "I know nothing about that. All I know is this: Jones died in that wreck."

"How do you know?"

"Well, we were out in the country. Jones didn't know how to drive, wanted to borrow my car and try. I told him not to, we struggled, I fell—hurt my jaw pretty bad, too. When I looked up, Jones was in the car, the car was out of control—and Jones went over the cliff with it. Nasty business."

"I'll say. You didn't report it sooner?"

"No. No, I was injured and I must admit I—I had a few drinks too many. Had to be assisted to my room by the Citizen Clerk. I guess I should have remained there at the scene of the accident, but frankly, young lady—" satisfied, he watched a smile light up the homely, middle-aged face—"frankly, I was unnerved. I returned to the city by train and took those drinks...."

"I understand, sir. Yes, sir. I understand. I—what?" Evidently, someone behind her had spoken to the woman, for she turned around, and Gregory had time to see a startled look crawl over her face. Presently she turned to the screen again, more than a little agitated.

"Sir, we're making an appointment for you with the Department of Prognostication."

"Prognostication?" Gregory's pulses raced furiously. "Why is that?"

"The dead Citizen, Jones-2013-G38—his name was underlined in red. That means Prognostication's random sampling found him, discovered he would die at such and such a time, and reported it. The difficulty is, sir, he was supposed to die on Monday. Monday, sir. That's considerably in the future. Oh, yes, Prognostication will want to see you."

"When?" demanded Gregory. As long as he kept his head, he still had nothing to worry about.

"The appointment is coming through—ahh, here we are! You are to see a Citizen Tollotson, Department of Prognostication Building, at fourteen hours, Monday. Merely a routine check, sir. You can rest easily till Monday."

The screen went dark. He could rest easy, she'd said—except that Monday, fifteen hours, he was scheduled to die. His masquerade suddenly seemed quite ridiculous. How could the fact that he'd altered his identity help him? If certain unknown factors in his life indicated death on Monday, and if Prognostication declared it was inevitable—then didn't it follow that all the skullduggery in the world wouldn't help him? Anyway, he could not continue the ruse indefinitely. The woman had called him "sir" and not Citizen. True, she hadn't done that until he'd made allusions to her youth, but still, his clothing was clearly that of a man of some Departmental importance. On that account, if for no other reason, Gregory would soon trip himself up.

Except that it didn't matter. He'd be dead first. He laughed harshly. He might even drop dead on Monday in Citizen Tollotson's office, provided the interview lasted long enough.

AN HOUR later, he knew the tests had come. Not knowing what

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Citizen Alec would do with his time and not knowing how to find out, he walked the streets with a casual idleness which he found exhilarating. Not in all his life had he been able to do this. Always there was work, always something to do. Not now. Now there was nothing.

The streets were crowded, and the crisp afternoon sunshine made everything pleasant. As a matter of fact, Gregory thought wryly, the only thing that spoiled the situation was the Citizens. They looked hungry, unhappy, lonely even in crowds, mean, coarse, completely unappealing. Unsavory, almost.

Today, however, Gregory sensed a difference, an urgency. The Citizenry, collectively, was in a hurry. Each individual seemed to walk with his head down, his body tilted forward from the base of the spine, as if fighting a strong wind.

Gregory stopped one of them, a small, thin man with a bald head and shifty eyes. "What's the hurry, Citizen?"

"Here, let me go. The tests. The tests. I've got to enroll."

"What? And have they started already?"

The man freed his arm, scowled. "Naturally, naturally. Provided you enrolled at six hours this morning, when the announcement came. Here, Citizen, let me go." And the man fought his way down the street against a wind which did not exist.

Gregory smiled. Well, why not? At least it would give him something to do. He'd come close last time, that had been the verdict of the Department of Tests. He could just picture Diane's face if he made it this time. . . . What's the matter with me? he thought. He could picture Diane's face, indeed. If he made it, he would still be Alec Sampter, not Gregory Jones. Diane might learn that he, Alec, made it—but of Gregory she must learn nothing. And Diane, Diane herself would stand a good chance this year.

Following the earnest crowd, Gregory passed the shining white facade of the Department of Prognostication Building. Day after tomorrow, he'd enter it, seek out Citizen Tolotson. He'd glide silently along the moving corridors, like any one of a thousand Citizens on routine business, but he'd be an hour away from death. Maybe. And quite at once, it struck him as odd that the Department Buildings *did* have moving corridors, clean, shining walls, air-conditioning—while the barracks were bare beyond austerity. Careful, Gregory, you must never doubt. As an inconsequential Citizen you could do it and get away with it, too, for no one cared. But as Citizen Alec Sampter—who worked in one Department or another, obviously, have care. Besides, the Departments functioned for the good of the Citizens. More important than that, what did austerity matter as long as a chosen few each year could embark for the Utopia colonies? Each man was an equal. Anyone might go, as long as he passed the tests. Often, Gregory wondered about the Utopia colonies. His most secret heart-of-hearts located them on the planet Mars, but he never told anyone. There a man could get all the food he wanted, good food, with plenty of palate-tingling variety, and all the drink, and he was comfortably warm by winter, cool by summer. He worked a little and played mostly, and all menial tasks were done for him.

Yes, thought Gregory, he would pass the tests. Then, if he lived beyond Monday, he'd space out to the Utopia colonies, where a man could

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start life anew, where the masquerade wouldn't matter. And, if Diane made it too, he might have Diane as well for, as was the girl's way, she had a quick new passion for Citizen Alec Sampter.

"DIANE!"

"Cit-citizen Alec!" The girl's face turned white.

Crowds buffeted them here on the fifteenth floor in the Department of Tests Building. People hopped off the moving corridor, timidly entered the cubbies provided for them. Gregory had just now reached floor fifteen, where those whose names began with the letter S registered. Diane? Naturally he'd meet Diane here. Her last name was Sanders.

"What happened to your face?"

Gregory fingered his lopsided jaw. "Nothing much, really. An accident—"

"And your voice. Your voice sounds —peculiar. Familiar, almost—but different. Are you all right, Citizen? I'm angry, you know. You didn't help me with my studies, and—"

"I'm sorry," said Gregory, trying to imitate Citizen Alec's voice.

"Well," Diane pouted, "you didn't have to go off like that yesterday. Did that nasty Citizen Gregory turn your head or something?"

So now he was nasty. Diane had found someone she thought could help her with the tests, had found Alec who now was dead, and thus snubbed Gregory, who now was Alec. "Don't speak that way of the dead," Gregory told her severely.

"The what? The dead?"

"The dead. Your friend Citizen Gregory drove my car off a cliff and killed himself. Horrible accident."

"What? When, where....?" Diane looked bewildered, commenced to sniffle.

Enjoying himself—he never thought he'd enjoy talking about his own demise—Gregory explained. When he finished, Diane looked almost sick.

"Gregory and I, we—Gregory and I were, well, we used to—oh, Alec!" And she nestled against his shoulder, wailing. Citizens turned to watch, and some of them snickered, figuring no doubt, that for some reason she'd been denied registration.

Gregory patted her hair. "The tests, my dear," he said softly. "You must compose yourself for the tests. They won't wait for you, and if you're not at your best—"

THAT WORKED wonders. Diane knuckled her eyes, small-girl fashion, and smiled. "You're right, Citizen Alec. And now, now I need you. Oh yes, Citizen, I do. I know I'm shameless to say it like this, but I need you."

"I understand," Gregory said. "Don't you worry, my dear." (Would Citizen Alec talk like that, he wondered?) "Don't you worry at all. I'm registering too, and if we're both lucky, we'll space out for Utopia together. We'll enter the colonies together. We'll enjoy them together, if you'd like."

Diane stopped her sniffling. "You're so confident, Alec. I wish I could be like that, I wish I could feel so sure of myself. But I, well, I leaned on poor Gregory. Yes, I did. Oh, I did! I realize it now. And would you still say all this if you thought, well, if you thought I'd lean on you, too?"

Gregory winked at her, realized Alec wouldn't have done that at all, then shrugged it off. He was learning his role all the time, and right now Diane was too upset to realize anything. "You try it sometime," he told her. "I'm strong. You will probably find that I am a lot stronger than your

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Citizen Gregory, my dear."

"Oh, Alec!" She kissed him briefly, hardly more than pecking at his lips, and then she turned to enter one of the cubbies. "I'll see you after registration," she said.

As Gregory, he realized, she had used him, but as Alec it would be different. He entered one of the cubbies himself, chuckling. But the smile left his face when he thought of Monday.

THE MOST astounding thing about the tests, Gregory decided when he awoke on Monday morning and found the day cool and clear, was that Dane Kibberish had passed them.

Diane had won her birthright to Utopia, and so had Gregory, as Citizen Alec Sampter. He'd have been shocked had it gone otherwise. The tests had seemed easy. Each year, as far back as he could remember, they'd become simpler. The segment of society which won its way to Utopia, however, remained one five-thousandth, which was as he had always remembered it. That might indicate, then, that the Citizenry lost some of its intelligence with each passing year.

But Kibberish! Kibberish had passed. Gregory had seen him, Sunday evening, when the list was read in public. At first, the moon-faced man had stood there, too stunned to react. And when he did, when he finally did, Gregory remembered, he had cried. The tears had streamed down his fat cheeks uncontrollably, and he had cried: "It ain't right for me to go—no, not me. My kids, I'll have to leave them and it'll be years before they can space out too. Well, I'll be in the Utopia colonies to receive them one fine day, just you wait and see." He'd spoken to no one, to everyone.

Kibberish. Had Gregory been asked to name one man who would not stand a chance in the complex mental-emotional-physical exams, that man would have been Kibberish. It simply did not make sense.

And then, from all directions had come the joyous Citizens whose names had been read, laughing, screaming, crying, thumping one another on the back. There'd been speech-making, drinking, singing, dancing in the streets. And through it all, Gregory could not help watching the disconsolate majority trudging off sadly, returning to their barracks, their beds and their books—ready to try again when the testing returned.

Diane had been radiant, if somewhat hysterical. She'd jumped at him, shouted his name, laughed, cried, clawed him almost. "We're going. You and I, Alec, we're spacing out to Utopia. Oh, Alec, I knew something like this would happen. I knew we'd go, but if I somehow hadn't met you, well, I'd have gone alone and it wouldn't have been the same. Now I won't be able to work, I just won't be able, that's all. I'll be on edge until they let us know when we're going and I only hope it's soon. Alec, will they tell us what clothing we'll need? I mean, if it's Venus it will be warm, I think, but if it's Mars, well—"

"Don't worry," Gregory had said. "Everything will be waiting for us at the Utopia colonies, so we take nothing."

"But when, Alec? When?"

"Hard to say. Last year it was a full week after the tests, the year before, only a day or two. They'll announce it, my dear, and you can relax until they do."

THAT WAS yesterday, that was last night. But today, today was Monday. Death-day for Citizen Gregory Jones, although Citizen Gregory Jones already was listed as dead. Still, Greg-

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ory thought, with fear creeping back into his brain from where it had waited at the fringes of consciousness, you couldn't fool an inexorable pattern. And that pattern had said Gregory Jones must perish, at fifteen hours, on Monday.

Am I going to die, he wondered over and over. It is now nine hours, and will something happen at fifteen hours which will still my heart forever? But what can happen? I feel fine, I've never felt better. I have a lopsided face, but outside of that, I'm healthy. Yes, healthy. And I will be careful, although I don't have to worry about it, not until fifteen hours. But when the time comes, will what I do matter? What can have any consequence, aside from the grim fact itself: I'm going to die.

If he died in the office of Citizen Tollotson of the Department of Prognostication, would the Citizen suspect his masquerade? Gregory chuckled softly. What was the difference? After he perished, *if* he perished, let them think what they wanted. On the other hand, why did Citizen Tollotson want to see him? Would there be some penalty for bringing death to a Citizen earlier than the Department had predicted? But that was ridiculous, for Gregory-Alec hadn't been responsible for Alec-Gregory's death, not according to his story, and he saw no reason for anyone to doubt his story.

Then why did Citizen Tollotson want to see him?

AT FOURTEEN hours, Gregory entered the Department of Prognostication Building. It was not one of the larger Government buildings, but it had a certain charm. Here curving, graceful lines had been substituted for the harsh, rectangular lines of the other Government structures, and even the inscription above the entrance was in a sort of curving, delicate lettering:

GOVERNMENT IS OMNIPOTENT! PROGOSTICATION SEES THE FUTURE!

Claims to omnipotence could not be made, Gregory supposed, unless the future was included. The Department of Prognostication filled the breach for Government, viewing the future and predicting it upon occasion. And now, for the first time in his life, Gregory wondered. How could they do this? How, indeed? He smiled at his reflection in a highly polished wall. He doubted only because he wanted to doubt, only because doubting gave strength to his limbs when, if Prognostication were right, he stood one hour from death.

Pale and weak, Gregory reached the information desk. His mouth was dry, his palms clammy. His voice barely rose above a croaking whisper. "I have an appointment."

"With whom?" the woman demanded, doodling on a scratch-pad with her pencil.

"Citizen Tollotson."

"Name?"

"Gre—Alec Sampter!" *Careful, fool.*

"Oh, yes, Citizen Sampter." The woman had checked her list. "Fourth floor, room eight."

And moments later Gregory told himself, "So here I am. If Citizen Tollotson's business is involved, if Citizen Tollotson is long-winded, I probably will die in his office. Death —to be not. Or, to not be. Now, I wonder, is there a difference? Is it one of those or both or neither...."

Someone bumped him, coming out of the office. Gregory had expected a building filled with statisticians, small, bent men, myopic, very bookish. The man who came out wore Department

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of Prognostication purple, but he was huge; a head taller than Gregory, quite broad across the shoulders, thick-thewed. He had a face carved from old granite, and he wore some unknown weapon at his waist. Prognostication? Gregory didn't get it.

He entered the waiting room, sat down. There were three plush chairs, a window with a good view of the central plaza of the city, a desk, a receptionist talking into an autotype machine. The receptionist did not bother to look up. On the wall over her desk a clock faced Gregory, the red hand sweeping across the seconds inexorably.

Fourteen hours, fifteen minutes.

THERE WAS a door at the far end of the room bearing the simple legend: *Manager*. Citizen Tollotson, then, was in charge of Prognostication. For the hundredth time, Gregory thought: why does he want to see me? The question had a double urgency now. First, Gregory could expect forty-five minutes more of life. He'd come to accept that. Almost, there was a masochistic drive within him to see those forty-five minutes hurry by. What would a man do with the last forty-five minutes of his life, anyway? More than anything, Gregory had to know. The forty-five minutes were meaningless: he did not want them. Let them pass; let them take his life with them if they must, but let them pass.

And second, Citizen Tollotson was the manager. Not a minor official, pompous with imagined importance, but the manager. The living Gregory had seen the dead Gregory die, and that the living Gregory was Alec Sampter to Prognostication and to everyone else did not matter. *Someone* had seen Gregory die and he had died ahead of schedule. That called for a meeting with the manager of Prognostication. But why?

At fourteen hours, twenty-two minutes, Gregory began to sweat.

The room was cool, pleasantly air-conditioned he supposed. Still, he sweated. The slick material of his jumper did not readily absorb water, and he could feel the sticky dampness all over his body. Streams of perspiration from his armpits tickled his sides and he wanted to scratch them, to disperse them by rubbing the material of his jumper against them. He didn't. Any movement brought a rapid fluttering to his heart and a crazy thought twisted through his mind: *You're so frightened, you're liable to die of fright. Relax. . . .*

"Citizen Sampter!"

"Oh! Eh? What?" A terrible sticking pain clutched at the left side of his chest.

"I'm sorry if I startled you, Citizen Sampter. Manager Tollotson will see you now."

"Thank you," said Gregory, and stood up. If he leaned forward slightly, that eased the pain some. As he walked into the manager's office he took one look more at the wall clock. Fourteen:thirty.

"SIT DOWN," Manager Tollotson told him. "You look sick."

"I'll be all right," Gregory mumbled. The worst of the pain had passed, and as had happened so many times before, fright left him quickly. By the time he settled himself and faced the manager, he felt almost normal.

"Cig?" Tollotson offered a box, and Gregory selected one. It had an unfamiliar, delicious fragrance, and when he'd lighted it and inhaled, he realized it was the best he'd ever smoked. So Department men and ordinary Citizens smoked different cigs.

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"Frankly, Citizen Sampter, you have us puzzled," began Tollotson. He was a small man, in his thirties but well-preserved, with small, slitted eyes, slicked-back hair, a thin nose, a nervous tongue which darted out and licked his lips as he spoke. "We've made a preliminary investigation of you, and can find nothing. You're a Citizen, but with Department status. You seem to be unemployed. You have a strange habit of popping up every now and then, staying with us in our city for a while, then disappearing. You have no contractual arrangement with any woman, as far as we can tell you've never had. In brief, Citizen, you're something of a puzzle."

Gregory nodded, hardly paying attention. He could see the back of a clock on Tollotson's desk; vaguely, he could hear the mechanism purring. How much time did he have left?

"But we'll get back to that later," said Tollotson. "A man has been killed. Now, men are killed all the time, Citizen, except that these were very special circumstances. You know to whom I'm referring?"

"Gregory Jones." What time *was* it?

"Yes, Jones. Jones was to die today, at fifteen hours. Instead, he died last week. I think you know that this Department doesn't make mistakes: We can't afford to, because prognostications are useless if they don't come true. On the other hand, a record of verified predictions is essential to us, essential to Government. Do you follow?"

In spite of the situation, Gregory's interest began to rise. "I'm not sure I do," he admitted.

Government is based on power. Power is based on a lot of things. On the cold facts of physical might, on dependence, even on tradition. But as much as anything else, it is based on faith. That faith must be blind and unreasoning, thalamic, not cerebral. And it's something of a circle, Citizen Sampter, for it is faith in power I am talking about."

GREGORY got up, paced nervously. He caught a quick glimpse of the clock, sat down again. Fourteen: forty-five! "Wh-why are you telling me this?"

"I'm coming to that, Citizen. Government does not make mistakes. If it does, its subjects wonder, and where there is wonder there also is discontent, suspicion, doubt, and so forth. Now, one of the ways Government maintains blind faith is through Prognostication. We can predict. When we predict, things happen. Not sometimes, Citizen, but always. Result: blind faith. We predicted the death of Citizen Gregory Jones for today, in...uh...thirteen minutes. Unfortunately, he died before then."

Manager Tollotson leaned forward, jabbed a well-manicured finger at the air between himself and Gregory. "Just how do you think we predict, Citizen?"

"I don't know." *Twelve minutes.*

"We'll get back to that presently. More important for present consideration is this fact: three people knew that Citizen Jones died ahead of schedule. Citizen Dane Kibberish knew, Citizen Diane Sanders knew. And you also knew, Citizen Sampter. *We cannot let that knowledge get around. At all costs, we must stop it.*"

Gregory wanted to scream. Words, all those words were so much drivel. Citizen Gregory Jones did not die ahead of schedule. Ten minutes from now he would die—on time to the minute. Right here, in Manager Tollotson's office. Wouldn't Tollotson be

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surprised! I can just see his face, thought Gregory. Only I won't. I'll be dead.

"Very well. You now are aware that the knowledge must be suppressed. Let's return to my earlier question, Citizen. How do you suppose we predict things?"

"Why, I don't know. Probably you have some gadget. A thinking machine or something, which can take data and—"

"That's the theory. Oh, yes, that's the theory, Citizen. Pretty good, don't you think? You have Departmental status, and you believe it fully. Can you imagine how the average Citizen swallows it? When the spirit moves us, we predict death. We can predict it for everyone, if we want to. But for some unknown reason, we don't. We merely predict occasionally, but often enough to keep our power in mind. Often enough to show the Citizens the extent of our domain—why, it almost encroaches upon the old religious institution which, incidentally, is a corollary of what actually hap-

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pened. Government's power would have been restricted by anything like a religious institution. Result: no religion. Do I make myself clear?"

"What time is it?"

"Seven minutes to the fifteenth hour. Do I make myself clear?"

"Yes, yes! Go on!" He didn't, not at all.

"Do you know Citizen Dane Kibberish?"

THAT WAS an odd question. "Yes —no! No, I don't know him. Who is he?" Gregory knew Kibberish, but Citizen Alec Sampter did not.

"One of the three people who knew that Gregory Jones perished ahead of schedule. We're thorough, Citizen. We've checked on all the man's acquaintances and find that only three knew of his untimely demise. Now, take Kibberish as a case in point. He's stupid, quite stupid. Yet he has passed his tests and will be spaced out to the Utopia colonies later today."

"Today? Are they leaving for the colonies today?"

"Yes. The announcement will be made public in half an hour. At any rate, can't you understand what that means? Kibberish did not merit life on the colonies. *We gave it to him.* Because Kibberish has passed his tests, he won't remain here on Earth to tell what he knows. The same is true of the woman, Diane Sanders. Actually, she's not a bad specimen; she almost did pass her tests. She'll space out with Kibberish and with the others who passed legitimately."

"What about me?" Gregory wanted to know. "I passed the tests too. So why did you bring me here?"

"You're an unusual case, Citizen. First, as I have said, you have Departmental status, but you are apparently unemployed. We can find out nothing more. As for passing these tests, come now, Citizen. You came close—but emotionally you are too unstable. You can thank us for that."

Tollotson drummed his fingers on the desk, groping for words. "We have an opening here in this Department, Citizen Sampter. Thus, your choice boils down to this: you can space out to Utopia, or you can stay here and work with us. Your qualifications seem adequate, we can ferret out the cause for your emotional instability and destroy it. You should be a good man."

GREGORY nodded numbly, stood up and reached for another cig. He did not really want it, but in that position he could see the clock. Two minutes to the fifteenth hour!

"I know," Tollotson was saying. "Probably you prefer the Utopia colonies right now. But let me explain. It is a sort of game we play here in Prognostication, Citizen, and I think you will enjoy it. I have asked you how we make predictions; you could not answer the question. As yet, you haven't been told. Very well, this is your answer: *we don't make predictions at all.*"

"What? How can that be? I have known.... I have seen.... Why, in my own personal experience, I have— I don't understand...." The clock hummed and purred, hummed and purred. They'd better oil it one day soon, Gregory thought meaninglessly.

"Let me finish. We don't make predictions. We merely decide upon them in advance and then *make them happen.*"

A musical chiming sound filled the room. Fifteen hours....

Gregory stood up, whimpered, hurled the clock at a wall, laughed

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foolishly when it shattered. "WHAT?" he screamed. *"WHAT?"*..

Tollotson smiled. "You see? See how emotionally unstable you are? You receive a mild intellectual surprise, and you start throwing things. Obviously, under ordinary circumstances you'd be unfit for the Utopia colonies, as would be Sanders and Kibberish.

"At any rate, we cannot predict anything, no more than an ancient fortune-teller ever could. It is merely a demonstration of power. We decide it is time for a prediction; we predict. If it is a prediction of death, we select someone who is healthy, hence not likely to die ahead of schedule. Then, when the time comes, we see to it that he is destroyed. Physical violence, an accident, a virulent disease, the methods vary. Unfortunately, Citizen Gregory Jones crossed us up by dying too soon."

Tollotson leaned back, laced his fingers behind his head. "You can be a part of this—or you can space out for Utopia. The choice is yours."

Gregory felt giddy, light-headed. He'd never experienced anything like this before in his life. It was as if he weighed nothing; if he didn't plant

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his feet firmly, he'd likely float out through the window from sheer joy. He wasn't going to die: Prognostication was a ruse, a phony, a paper-dragon which snorted cellophane fire at the Citizenry and kept them fearful.

"My choice?" he said, his voice breaking. "My choice. Why—why, I shall space out to the Utopia colonies with the others, thank you, sir. If it is all the same to you, I shall space out for Utopia."

"Suit yourself," said Tollotson. "I suppose, then, that our little interview is concluded. You are sure you won't reconsider?"

"Yes. Yes, I'm sure. Tell me, confidentially, are the colonies on Venus or Mars? Some say that Venus has a poisonous atmosphere, while others insist Mars is too cold. . . ."

"I wouldn't know," said Manager Tollotson, dismissing Gregory with a curt nod of his head.

A WONDERFUL feeling of peace and well-being stole over Gregory as he walked toward the bus depot. It was a new feeling and he let it bathe him, body and soul. Often, he thought that the Leader must feel like that. But now he knew he had been a victim of indoctrination. The Leader, the mysterious Leader who ruled the world and whom no one knew, wasn't all sweetness and light. Far from it. The Leader was a vicious, heartless egoist, preying on the Citizenry in the guise of a benevolent ruler. Except, of course, for those few fortunates who merited Utopia.

Gregory walked along, whistling. The warm glow spread out from him—he could *feel* it spreading out to take in all the world, all the downtrodden masses who did not know what he did. Well, perhaps one day in the future he would return from Utopia, a wiser and better man, to teach them. Perhaps one day in the future he would expose Government for what it was. That, he told himself, was the least he could do. He'd escaped, as it were, from the jaws of death, and he'd escaped with knowledge. The Citizens lived in filth, poverty, ignorance, fear—lived that way so that Government might be powerful.

It wasn't right. Well, time would unfold his course of action for Gregory. Meanwhile, a glorious new life awaited him on the Utopia colonies.

He was running by the time he neared the bus depot, and he heard an amplified voice blaring forth instructions: "Colonists for Utopia, assemble on ramp seven! Colonists for Utopia, on ramp seven! Bus departure in fifteen minutes!"

"Ramp seven?" Gregory asked an attendant. "Where is ramp seven?"

The man looked at him with envy. "You're one of the colonists?"

"Yes."

"That way, sir." The man pointed, then trudged away wearily.

The bus was large, quite large, and shining new. Long and sleek, painted a bright blue, it awaited him. He could see the slots from which the gyro-blades would emerge after they left city traffic behind them.

And the colonists milled about happily, laughing, joking, hugging and kissing one another. He saw Dane Kibberish, almost said hello before he realized. Kibberish did not know him. Kibberish was talking about his two children who would join him one day in the colonies.

"Alec!"

She was running to him. Diane. She flung her arms around his neck,

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her body jarring him pleasantly. He held her that way, against him, while her lips brushed his neck, while she whispered, "We're colonists, colonists, colonists!"

AND THEN they filed into the bus and a smartly-uniformed driver climbed into his pilot chair. With a soft grinding sound, the bus swung away from its ramp. Gregory heard music, soft, wonderful music coming from some hidden microphone in the ceiling. He sat in one of the double seats near a window, and Diane set next to him, twining her fingers with his. They talked for a while, for a long while, and then it grew dark.

Soft lights, blue and soothing, lit up the interior of the bus. Soon after darkness was complete, Gregory became aware of a scraping sound, and through the window he could see the gyro-blades flashing in the bright moon light as they emerged. Moments later, the bus took to the sky, soaring over plain and hill and river, heading out westward to the launching site. Lethargy crept over Gregory, pleasantly. He kissed Diane, who was breathing regularly beside him, and then he slept.

It was morning. Someone came around with food, and they all ate.

"I'm so excited," said Diane.

"It ain't that I don't want to go," Dane Kibberish called from somewhere. "I want to go, and I will. I only wish it was my kids. Those kids . . ."

The bus had landed.

They filed out, slowly, happily. They were on the desert, on a wide, barren expanse of gleaming white sand. Gregory hardly saw it.

He was aware only of the spaceship.

It stood there, a long, slender

the boy who grew up in a house full of manless women

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column, tapering toward the top. Immense, more beautiful than anything he'd ever seen before, with the sunlight catching and highlighting a thousand points along its great surface.

"The ship!" cried Diane, running forward.

And others, "The ship, the ship! Here it is!"

"I wish they coulda seen it," mumbled Dane Kibberish, stumbling along in the second wave of people which surged forward.

Once Gregory looked back. Trailing dust behind it, the bus had departed.

And that was as it should be, he realized. Blast-off area was rigidly patrolled many miles away from the spaceship itself. There must be no stowaways, no one who did not belong, no one unfit for Utopia.

Other busses came, disgorged their Citizens, left. A thousand people laughed and cried and jumped up and down on the desert sand. Hand in hand, Gregory and Diane walked toward the gaping portal at the ship's base. Beside it was a small concrete structure, a sort of block house, and as Gregory came closer, he saw three men standing there. Bright green uniforms, yellow insignia. Deputies to the leader, those three silent men! Of course, they would be the ones to send the ship hurtling on its automatic course to the stars.

EVERYTHING had a dreamlike quality. The eager lines of Citizens shuffling forward, the too-bright sun, the endless flat carpet of the desert, the huge ship. Mostly the ship, symbol for everything which was beautiful and good and fine and wonderful.

"The ship," Diane breathed, almost reverently, and entered. The port was small, smaller than Gregory had realized, and he'd pushed her ahead of him, preparing to follow.

A hand fell heavily on his shoulder, Another one grabbed his arm. Horrified, he gazed upon the stolid faces of the Leader's deputies. Virtually no one ever saw those green uniforms, but everyone knew and feared their color. Then, somehow, his ruse had been discovered. Perhaps it was the one-eyed man, he thought grimly, perhaps they'd learned that Gregory Alec had murdered the one-eyed man.

"Please!" he cried. "I must enter the ship."

"Well said," one of the deputies grunted, and then they pulled him away from the portal. He struggled, turned once and saw Diane standing there in indecision. But those behind pushed forward, and soon she disappeared within the ship.

They bore Gregory, struggling, to the concrete blockhouse. They thrust him inside and returned to watch the Citizens file into the ship. Twice Gregory ran for the door, and twice they shoved him back, and whimpering hopelessly, Gregory fled into the little concrete room and waited.

All his plans and dreams, for nothing. He'd discovered evil and achieved his own personal triumph simultaneously, and now neither mattered. Once again, death loomed before him. Well, they couldn't do that, not without a fight. Maybe he would not achieve the happiness of the colonies, but with his dying breath he would fight the evil which had done this, the evil which was responsible, somehow, for all his troubles.

Presently the stolid figures entered the block house, shut the door behind them. Hopelessly, Gregory gazed out through the one thick win-

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dow at the spaceship. Then, one of the men crossed the room, fingered a lever protruding from the wall, pulled it down.

OUTSIDE, there was a flash, a blinding, searing stab of light. Gregory gaped. The huge spaceship was aflame!

It burned brightly and quickly, the seething, rolling flames engulfing its entire length in micro-seconds. "An accident!" Gregory screamed. "They'll all die."

Quickly, the ship burned and burned. Soon it was nothing more than a charred, blackened ruin.

"They're already dead," said one of the deputies. "The new cremation setup is even better than last year's."

The words took time to penetrate. Cremation?

Cremation! Gregory's heart felt like it would explode. *Fool, fool, don't you see?* There were no Utopia colonies, ever. The standard of living was low, and yet the Citizens had to produce, produce, produce. They couldn't remain idle. They produced meaningless gadgets for a colony which did not exist, thought Gregory. They dreamed of going there, too, to that place which did not exist, and it was that dream, above everything else, which kept them satisfied with their mean existence. They dreamed and hoped and yearned and studied themselves straight to a crematorium!

It was unspeakable evil. The world had never known anything like it. And he was as good as dead, Gregory knew. But if he could take something of that evil to the grave with him, if he could fight it, if he could even kill one of these deputies....

"You had us worried," one of them said.

"Indeed you did. We looked every-

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where. Some day that propensity of yours for going down among the Citizens and looking for trouble spots will get *you* into trouble."

No Utopia colonies, thought Gregory. No space travel. A terrible lie, like so much else, and—*What!* Evil was a relative thing, and Gregory began to laugh. The warm feeling of well-being crept over him once more. This time, he knew it would stay. Alec Sampter, who had Departmental status but who seemed unemployed, who came to the city briefly and lived in a hostel. . . .

One of the deputies demanded, "What happened to your face, Mightiness?"

"Eh?" said Gregory. "Nothing. Just an accident. But perhaps you're right. Perhaps I'd better be more careful in the future," the Leader finished.

THE END

THE NUMBER OF BEAUTY

By Wilton Avery MacDonald

TO THE person unacquainted with, or uninterested in, mathematics, no two fields could seem farther apart than mathematics and esthetics. Such a person might well ask what's beautiful about a symbol or a number. And any professional mathematician would immediately unlimber his slide rule and come at the questioner with both barrels blazing, for he has long known that, just as there is to any human undertaking, there is an esthetic side to mathematical creativity.

But, specifically, it is possible to tag esthetics and beauty with a number, a certain definite number, in use (unconsciously perhaps) since the ancient Greeks first turned out their masterpieces. The Greeks called the arrangement of lines, actually a numerical ratio, the "Golden Mean", and this, when tagged with an actual numerical value, is the beauty-number we're speaking about.

The number is expressed by a decimal as .618, a little larger than six-tenths. It appears all over Nature, and human beings use it constantly, usually unaware that it exists. It is the Golden Mean expressed by a number. If you divide a straight line of length A into two smaller parts of length B and length C so that the ratio of B to C is the same as the ratio of C to A, you'll find that C is .618 of A. That's all there is to it—that is the Golden Mean.

The Greeks didn't use the number as such, but they did use the ratio, and its effectiveness and beauty are visible in everything they created, from their literally colossal architecture to their peerless sculpture. Today designers employ .618 as the ratio of any pleasing rectangular construction, be it a billboard or a new washing machine. It just seems to look nice. The observer gets a pleasant feeling and he says, "It looks like the *right* proportion"—and that's the Golden Mean.

Nature employs it in so many ways. The shapes of natural shells, such as those of sea animals like the chambered nautilus, take the form of a logarithmic spiral which derives directly from the .618 ratio. Sunflower seeds arrange themselves in logarithmic spirals in the same way. Even waves rolling against a beach use this logarithmic spiral form.

Recently the idea of mathematical proportion in beauty was carried to the extreme when a mathematician wrote a lavishly detailed book endeavoring to show that great art could stem directly from calculation. This moot point, which caused considerable excitement in the worlds of mathematics and art, is at variance with the more popular belief that it is impossible to harness esthetic ideas within a rigid mathematical framework.

As far as the Golden Mean goes, though, because somehow Nature has built within itself, and within humans, an appreciation of this subtle ratio, men of the future will find figures composed of, and based on, it as pleasing as we do now, and as pleasing as our ancestors did ten thousand years ago!

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MADHOUSE FOR A NUCLEUS

ANYONE who has studied high-school chemistry and physics can remember the neat picture of the atomic nucleus that was presented to him by all the textbooks. Within the nucleus was a complex consisting of protons and neutrons, and surrounding them was a shell of electrons. The electrons accounted for chemical properties, the nucleus for physical ones. And that was that.

But the atomic age has changed that. While the image still serves as an easy introduction to atomic physics and nuclear work, it is far from being comprehensive, and is essentially little more than an oversimplification.

The truth of the matter is that physics no longer "knows" exactly what the nucleus of an atom is like. Certainly there are protons, positively charged masses; and there are neutrons, which carry no charge but have equivalent masses. Both of these particles are about eighteen hundred times as massive as the fundamental electron.

But, by bombarding the nucleus with terrific jets of neutrons, atomic scientists have succeeded in penetrating and shattering the atom beyond repair—witness the Bomb! And from this disintegration things totally unexpected. Positive electrons are one thing! In addition, the peculiar *mesons*, which seem to have a variable charge and a variable mass, seem to be a cross between matter and energy. Wave mechanics and energy levels have pretty well cleared the picture of the surrounding electrons. They are fairly well understood in their relation to matter and energy and chemical and physical reactions. But the mystery of the atomic core remains almost as great as before.

The heart of the atom is a great deal more complicated than our high-school days suggested but, as often occurs in science, a unified theory could unite all these ideas into that paradoxical entity, a simple complex. And that is what will probably happen. Right now there is such confusion regarding the interior of the atom that it is hardly possible to give a coherent account of what an atomic heart is. Nevertheless, the time is ripe for a unifying theory, and it is likely that we shall see it soon.

But, whatever theory comes out of these new discoveries about the heart of the atom, you may be sure that they will violate common sense and will require an orientation in thinking just as did the quantum theory and the theory of relativity!

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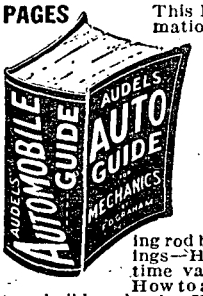

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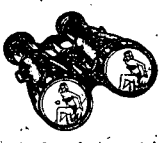

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READER'S PAGE

A HOUSEWIFE SAYS...

Dear Editor:

I have never written to your magazine before, although I had a letter of mine printed in your sister magazine AS some eight years ago, before I was married. I have been reading all the science fiction magazines I could get my hands on for the last 15 years, and after I was married seven years ago I managed to convert my husband to reading all the magazines I did. He likes them almost as well as I do now, although at first he thought there was something wrong with anybody that liked science fiction.

All these years I have been reading science fiction my favorite magazine has been FA, bar none. The reason I am writing this letter is that all this controversy about sex or no sex in your magazines has got me riled. How can anyone believe a story is very realistic without a little love interest?

I don't prefer magazines reeking with sex and love, but I do think a story is more interesting if there is a girl somewhere in the story. I prefer conservative front covers, but I don't care if you have half-dressed girls inside. Every time I buy your magazine at the drug store and there is a nude girl on the front cover I receive a lot of sickly grins and knowing looks from the men present. This has gotten so embarrassing to me that I have my husband buy all the magazines that I read that are likely to have nudes on the cover.

I like stories like "Planet of No Return" or most of the stories that most of your readers think are too much like Tarzan stories.

Over the last five years I have saved a lot of the magazines I have bought, and now I have so many I have no room to store them.

I have about 175 magazines—all science fiction. If you have room, would you please print the following list:

AS: October 1947; March, May—December 1948; January-June, August-December 1949; January-March, June, July, November, December, 1950; February, April-June, August-December 1951; January-March 1952.

FA: April-October, December 1948; January, March-May, July, September, October, December, 1949; January March-August, November, 1950; January-March, May, June, October-December 1951; January-March 1952.

Also TWS, FN, FS, FFM, SS, FSQ, PLANET, WEIRD, AMF, 10-STORY FANTASY, SUPER SCIENCE, WONDER STORY ANNUAL, SFQ, OUT OF THIS WORLD, GALAXY, OTHER WORLDS, SCIENCE FICTION READER, ASF, FSF, FANTASY AND SCIENCE FICTION, and pocketbooks, WORLDS OF IF by Rog Phillips, ODD JOHN by Olaf Stapledon.

Most of these magazines and books are in good to excellent condition. I will sell these for any reasonable offer, and would prefer to sell in larger amounts as it would make quite a few trips for me to the post office if they were all sold in very small amounts. It is hard for me to get out as I have three small children.

I hope I will continue to enjoy your magazine for many more years. You can count on me as a constant reader as long as you don't take all the girls out of the stories. Keep up the good work.

(Mrs. Walter) Eileen Mahany
6008 Harper Avenue
Chicago, Illinois

Take out the girls? Why, whatever for?
..... *Ed.*

LONGER NOVELS!

Dear Editor:

For fear of having this letter reach you too late for publication, I am writing it the day after your magazine hit the local newsstand. Hope this is fast enough.

Naturally I haven't read the stories, but I have read the editorial, letters, and looked at the illustrations.

First, I don't care for covers by Summers. Let's have him about once every twenty-four issues.

Very glad to see that this issue contains stories by two of my favorite authors, Fairman and Phillips. I always enjoy their work.

Your editorial was no surprise. AMAZING beat you to the announcement. It is good news, though. In your March issue you ask if we could guess what the surprise was. Well, I guessed, but didn't guess

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the right thing. I thought that maybe we were going to have trimmed edges. Maybe that's too much to ask for.

One thing wrong with FA's stories. NO LONG NOVELS! There's plenty of room for stories with thirty-five and forty thousand words. So how about it? You could even throw in a serial, for good measure.

Another thing I don't like in FANTASTIC are those horrible articles. Throw them out. Then make the editorials longer.

For the past few months I have been crying over the loss of "Men Behind Fantastic". This month it comes back. After reading it in AMAZING I didn't bother to read it again. Frankly, it isn't worth reading. Keep "Men Behind Fantastic", but make it good. The longer the better with me.

I would like to have several hundred fen write me, so we could set up corresponding. I put out a fanzine (if it could be called that) and send it free to all my correspondents.

I may have made several enemies with this letter, I may have made some friends. But no matter what you will hear from me again next month.

David Jewett
E-305 East 54th Avenue
Vancouver, Washington

WE ARE?

Dear Sir:

It is a wonder to me that FANTASTIC ADVENTURES had the nerve to put down a set of 'commandments' and break these rules in the same issue. The sixth commandment reads: "Thou shalt not listen only to the tinkle of the coins in thy pocket. Thou must remember always that thou carriest a responsibility to they audience." Aren't you violating your own 'commandment' by cutting FANTASTIC ADVENTURES shorter than AMAZING STORIES, its sister magazine? I should like to compare the two magazines, as I have an issue of each before me:

	AMAZING	FANTASTIC
Pages	162	130
Words	72,500	63,600

This little chart makes the short-changing to the readers obvious. This letter probably won't get printed but I know that many science-fiction fans echo my thoughts. I am writing this in the hope that some day you will (as you so ably put it) stop listening only to the tinkle of the coins in thy pocket and carry out thy responsibility to thy audience.

Victor D. Lippit
1293 East 49th Street
Brooklyn, New York

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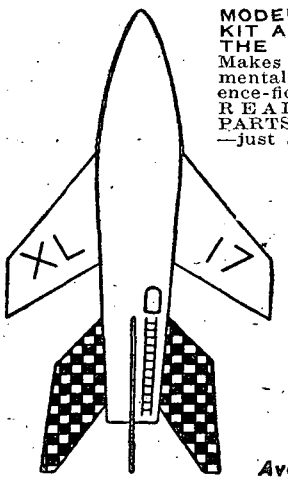

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tion, and are working diligently to overcome them. Just keep watching FA. . . . Ed.

FLYING SAUCER HITS THE JACKPOT

Dear Editor:

FANTASTIC ADVENTURES, March 1952:

"He Fell Among Thieves"—this novel by Milton Lesser, featured in the above issue, was excellent. Not great, you understand, no classic, but nevertheless excellent. Unable to put it down, I finished it at one sitting.

Its originality was most refreshing. A flying saucer, piloted by "a little green creature who'd come to Earth from the unknown depths of space" lands in Russia. Russia, of all places. Up to now, all saucer stories I have read had landings confined to the U.S.A. Occasionally England. But never beyond the Iron Curtain on Soviet soil. Then along comes Lesser with a new twist. And my hat is off to him for it.

It is in the hope of finding just such yarns as "He Fell Among Thieves" that I keep on buying your publication. And the jackpot was hit a mighty blow in the March number. Please keep this Lesser chap busy. So what if he gets writer's cramp? Dust off the whip. He is too gifted an author to remain idle. (What a heartless brute I am!) So keep after him, Ed. I want—no, demand!—another novel from him, the longer the better. Lesser won't let me down I'm sure. His next effort will prove as interesting and worthwhile as his latest.

I enjoyed the rest of the stories. "Brothers Beyond the Void" by Paul W. Fairman; and Mack Reynolds' "Your Soul Comes C.O.D." were tied for second place. Both clever. "The Travelling Brain" by William P. McGivern comes third, while Frances M. Deegan's "The Master Key" slides into last position.

Leo Ramon Summers' front cover painting was very good.

Best inside illo? No problem to decide. Orchids to Virgil Finlay for his work on the lead novel on pages ten and eleven.

The Reader's Page can't be too long to suit me.

Oh, yes, one thing more. In answer to James O'Brien. Charles Fort wrote four books to intrigue any soul with only a meagre imagination. Namely, "The Book of the Damned", "New Lands", "Lo", and "Wild Talents". These were published under one cover in 1941 for the Fortean Society by Henry Holt and Co. of New York City.

Alex Saunders
34 Hillsdale Avenue, West
Toronto 12, Ontario, Canada

300 YEARS TO SPACE

Dear Editor:

You have a fine magazine; along with AMAZING, they make two of the finest in their field. No wonder I'm poor, can't help but buy them when I see them on the newsstand.

I have only one gripe, those corny "Jongor" stories. I can't stomach them, although hundreds of other fans eat them up. If I wanted a jungle story I'd buy JUNGLE TALES, but I want fantasy and stf.

Four or five of my chums got together at our club one evening, and the conversation drifted to space flight and when space itself would be conquered. We all had different ideas on how it would be done and when.

Okay, readers! Here's what I'd like: write me a letter, postal card or what have you, and name the year you think space flight will be a reality. I will keep all cards and letters and see how many similar guesses there are. Then in due time I'll write the result to FANTASTIC ADVENTURES.

My own guess? Not before the year 2250.

If you don't believe me, stick around and see how long space flight takes, or better, send me your guess.

Joseph Stamp
28 Churchill
Georgetown, Ontario, Canada

It'll be interesting to see your tabulations, Joe. We don't quite agree with you—not by a long shot. But what do our other readers think? . . . . . Ed.

FOR BROOKLYN FANS ONLY

Dear Ed:

Ever since I had a letter of mine published in FANTASTIC ADVENTURES, I have been getting many invites to science-fiction conclaves. As I am very interested in this topic, it would seem that I would be very happy, but this is not the case. You see, these meetings of science-fiction clubs have all been held in places not convenient to me or my friends, who are also interested in joining such groups.

My friends and I are fourteen years old and we live in Brooklyn. I, speaking for them, place myself in your capable hands, in the hope that you will suggest some groups in Brooklyn that have younger factions in them and that you recognize as being good clubs. Thanks a lot!

Mel Chase
1119 Foster Avenue
Brooklyn 30, New York

We're sure some Brooklyn fans will see your letter, and you'll be hearing from them. . . . . Ed.

THE BEST THERE IS

Dear Ed:

I first started reading science fiction

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about four years ago. During that time I found FA and your companion magazine AS to be the best in the field. Keep up the good work.

Now let's get down to business. My favorite author is Geoff St. Reynard (Robert W. Krepps). Let's see more of him. Also, how about printing some of Burroughs' old stories?

Jack Cohen
78 Avenue "C"
New York 9, New York

As far as we know, there is no unpublished Burroughs material. And our present policy for AS and FA is no reprints. ..... *Ed.*

A FIRST LETTER

Dear Editor:

This is the first time I've written to any science-fiction magazine. Though I have read AMAZING STORIES and FANTASTIC ADVENTURES for several years now, I've never bothered to write.

I just wanted to congratulate you on the very nicely written short story, "Your Soul Comes C.O.D." It's based on an old plot, but sure winds up with a brand new twist. The story had everything in it that a person would want in one.

"He Fell Among Thieves" was pretty good. But what about some Venus stories? Seems like Mars stories are being overdone somewhat. I also liked "Brothers Beyond the Void". Another good plot. "The Travelling Brain" and "The Master Key" were also well written. In fact, I really enjoyed this March issue a lot.

The cover on the front of the magazine was different. Though why not run a cover of just a modern-version spaceship sometime for a change?

Raleigh E. Multog
7 Greenwood Road
Pikesville 8, Maryland

THE BEST SO FAR

Dear Ed:

I just finished reading the March issue of FA and I think it's one of the best I've read so far. I've been reading FA for about a year.

Here is the way I think the lead stories of these books are rated:

(1) "The Dead Don't Die," by R. Bloch
(2) "He Fell Among Thieves," by M. Lesser
(3) "Rest in Agony," by Ivar Jorgensen
(4) "The Man Who Stopped at Nothing," by Paul Fairman
(5) "Invasion from the Deep," by Fairman
(6) "Excalibur and the Atom," by Ted Sturgeon

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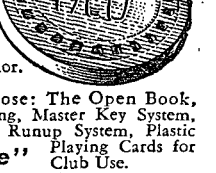

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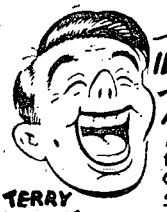

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(7) "Pattern for Tomorrow," by M Storm
(8) "Medusa was a Lady," by W. Tenn
(9) "Nine Worlds West," by C. Gar son
(10) "Jongor Fights Back," R. M. Wil liams
(11) "The Sword of Ra," G. St Reynard

At the place where I buy my FA mag I haven't noticed any of those three i one issues that come out every season.

Keep up the good work.

Don Schmitz
537 West Indian
Wheaton, Illinois

We don't put out the FANTASTIC AD VENTURES and AMAZING STORIES Quarterlies any more. All our issues sol so well, that we didn't have any remainc ers left to bind this way. .....Ec

GOOD ISSUE—BAD COVER

Dear LES:

The April issue of FA, just read-b yours truly, was a most enjoyable on The cover, alas, was bad again, but in terior illos were of a high standard, s this can be overlooked.

"The Jack of Planets", by Paul Fai man, was excellent, the best in the issu

"A more Potent Weapon" by Rog Phi lips ranks a close second. If there was clearer pattern to the story it would de initely have gotten first place. As it wa however, it was a little confusing and un clear in spots. Very good, anyway.

"The Unfinished Equation" and "Th Chase" were both equally good, althoug the latter gave the impression of bein written in a hurry.

"The Green Cat" was only average, I' sorry to say.

"The Reader's Page" was full and i teresting this issue, and I see I had n letter published. Mucho Grazia, senora. see you are a senora, too, LES. Th came as quite a shock to me, always co sidering you of the male sex (if you pardon the word). A pretty one, too.

The best letter is that of Hap Kliba which was both amusing and intelligen with Arline Gingold's just a few laps b hind it. Mr. Everett states that Ed Va gursky's cover painting for the Februa issue should be printed on slick paper- that near horrified me. Perhaps I'm ju mentally incompetent, but I can't unde stand how one can stand that type cove cover. On second thought, it would.

Keep up your high story standard, an let's see a cover by Bok once, hah?

Robert D. McNamara
50 Plaza Street
Brooklyn 17, New Yor

Well—thanks! ..... E

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THE PIT OF GRAVITY

THERE IS a fearsome chain which, despite all optimistic talk of rocketeers and space enthusiasts, remains to be broken before Man leaves the Earth. The chain is, of course, gravity. The awesomeness of the problem can best be realized by making a graph or chart of the force (more properly, the acceleration due to gravity) of gravity against the distance from the Earth. This graph takes the form of an easily visualized curve, very steep near the Earth and then flattening rapidly once you get fifty thousand kilometers or so outward into space. It's the familiar "inverse square law".

If you invert this mental picture your curve looks like the section through a deep pit—and that is, in a way, exactly what it is—the pit of gravity, against which a rocket must fight in order to leave the Earth. It says that a certain definite amount of work must be done in order to escape the gravitational clutches of this planet. The same sort of sketch can be made for the Moon, the Sun and the planets, and all will exhibit to a greater or lesser degree the same "pit-form." For the Moon, the pit will be much smaller and easier "to climb out of"—in perfect accordance with our knowledge that a rocket flight *from* the Moon is relatively easy.

This pit of gravity will eventually be conquered, that we know. But we also know that, no matter what device we use, from the basic chemical rocket, through atomic-powered rockets, to some as yet unimagined method of neutralizing gravity, a definite amount of energy must be expended, a definite amount of work must be done, to escape this pit. The gravitational pit demands a certain toll, no matter what the currency used to pay it.

Often the pit is plotted in terms of constant gravity—and this shows even more clearly the problem which science will overcome. The man planning to launch a rocket to escape the Earth is essentially a man located at the bottom of a pit four thousand miles deep, facing one constant gravity! What a monstrous barrier to overcome! But men have overcome more fearsome obstacles—a planet has been explored in cockle-shells and the air has been conquered by flimsy aluminum wings. Can the pit of gravity resist such determination as this? The answer is—naturally—no!

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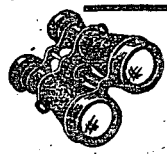

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By Jon Barry

THE "VAST, barren, emptiness of space" is neither so barren nor so empty as was once thought. For a long time astronomers have believed systems such as our Solar System were the result of rare accident. They no longer believe this. In fact, it is almost a certainty that a good portion of the thousand billion stars that we see through our scopes are encircled by planetary systems—the figure running as high perhaps as one out of a hundred, certainly at least one out of a thousand. This means that there are at least a billion planetary systems extant!

How can astronomers deduce these facts when it is known that the actual sight of such systems will be forever denied us—unless we reach the stars? The basic physics of optical systems prevents us even from viewing the planets of these remote suns directly. No telescope can ever be made to show them.

The existence of additional planetary systems was discovered gradually. It was noticed that many stars are really double stars consisting of two revolving around a common center of gravity. Better instruments resolved the separation of these two components. Later, peculiar disturbances in stellar motions were observed which could only be explained on the basis of "dark" or invisible companions to stars. Subsequent mathematical analysis has shown that no matter what hypothesis we adopt for explaining the origin of a star, certain quantities such as angular momentum require that stars cannot exist, for the most part by themselves, but must have associated with them additional stellar bodies which may be either companion suns (visible) or burnt-out suns, or planets.

As to the problem of life—well, that of course can't be answered on the basis of any observations. Only speculation can take place. In such a vast number of potential living-places, certainly the accident that produced protoplasm from inorganic matter must have take place more than once even considered statistically. While the form may not have taken our own, it is a good and safe bet to assume that the mysterious force we call life exists elsewhere in the island universes and galaxies which surround us. Technology offers us no immediate hope of ever attaining the stars though the planets will soon be with us—but science is unfettered and some day men (we like to think) will reach the stars. They will find life!

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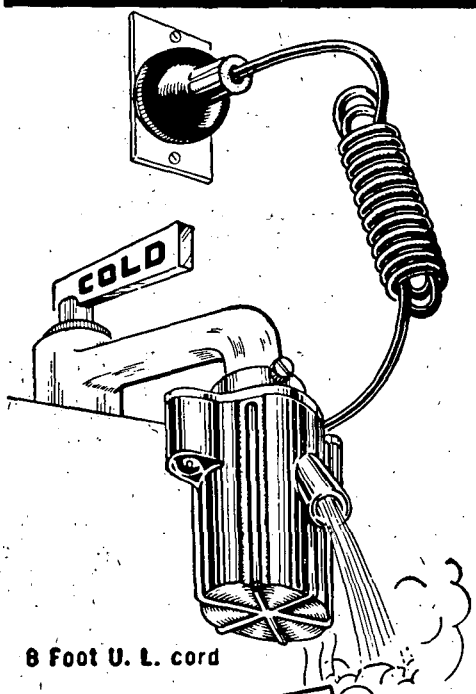

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